

I Must Walk Through the Gate:

An Ontological Necessity

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## Abstract

*Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue.*

*Henry James (1884)*

This research is a self-study into my life as an athlete, elementary school teacher, learner, and as a teacher educator/academic. Throughout the inquiry, I explore how my beliefs and values infused my lived experiences and ultimately influenced my constructivist, humanist, and ultimately my holistic teaching and learning practice which at times disrupted the status quo. I have written a collection of narratives (data generation) which embodied my identity as an unintelligent student/learner, a teacher/learner, an experiential learner, a tenacious participant, and a change agent to name a few. As I unpack my stories and hermeneutically reconstruct their intent, I question their meaning as I explore how I can improve my teaching and learning practice and potentially effect positive change when instructing beginning teacher candidates at a Faculty of Education.

At the outset I situate my story and provide the necessary political, social, and cultural background information to ground my research. I follow this with an in depth look at the elements that interconnect the theoretical framework of this self-study by presenting the notion of writing at the boundaries through autoethnography (Ellis, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 2004) and writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2000).

The emergent themes of experiential learning, identity, and embodied knowing surfaced during the data generation phase. I use the Probyn's (1990)

metaphor of locatedness to unpack these themes and ponder the question, Where is experience located? I deepen the exploration by layering Drake's (2007) Know/Do/Be framework alongside locatedness and offer descriptions of learning moments grounded in pedagogical theories.

In the final phase, I introduce thirdspace theory (Bhabha, 1994; Soja, 1996) as a space that allowed me to puzzle educational dilemmas and begin to reconcile the binaries that existed in my life both personally, and professionally. I end where I began by revisiting the questions that drove this study. In addition, I reflect upon the writing process and the challenges that I encountered while immersed in this approach and contemplate the relevance of conducting a self-study. I leave the reader with what is waiting for me on the other side of the gate, for as Henry James suggested, "Experience is never limited, and it is never complete."

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## Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
List of Figures.....	viii
 <b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	 <b>1</b>
King's College Circle.....	1
First Placement.....	3
Journal March 5, 2007.....	7
Entering the Profession.....	12
Change Agent.....	16
The Street Party.....	18
Self-Understanding.....	21
Background of the Problem.....	25
 <b>CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....</b>	 <b>58</b>
Understanding the Self.....	58
Self-Study.....	60
Writing at the Boundaries.....	62
Autoethnography.....	64
Limitations.....	66
Criteria for Assessing the Work.....	73
Method (Data Generation).....	77
Conclusion.....	89
 <b>CHAPTER THREE: DATA GENERATION.....</b>	 <b>91</b>
Narrative 1–Anticipation.....	91
Narrative 2–Recollections.....	106
Narrative 3–Coronation Park.....	129
Narrative 4–Nuclear Family.....	139
Narrative 5–Challenge and Service.....	146
Narrative 6–Mr. Ellis.....	160
Narrative 7–Doors .....	167
Emergent Themes.....	180
 <b>CHAPTER FOUR: LOCATEDNESS.....</b>	 <b>182</b>
Where is Experience Located?.....	182
Local.....	186
Locale.....	201
Location.....	237
 <b>CHAPTER FIVE: THE LEARNING SPACE.....</b>	 <b>245</b>
Overview.....	245
Local/KNOW.....	246

Locale/DO.....	264
Location/BEing.....	279
<b>CHAPTER SIX: THIRDSPEACE.....</b>	<b>291</b>
Overview.....	291
Teacher Performance Appraisal.....	291
Theoretical Perspectives on Thirdspace and Hybridity.....	295
Constructing Third Space.....	299
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN: I MUST WALK THROUGH THE GATE.....</b>	<b>311</b>
Questions Revisited.....	312
Significance of this Self-Study.....	317
Writing Process.....	319
Educational Relevance of Self-Study.....	324
Future Studies.....	327
And Finally.....	328
References.....	331
Appendix A – Informed Consent.....	351

## List of Figures

Figure	Page
1: A Photograph of Loon-Sky-Lake; Building Community One Student at a Time.....	45
2: Visual Representation of the Methodological Process.....	78



## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*When someone asks you who you are, you tell your story. That is, you recount your present condition in the light of past memories and future anticipations. You interpret where you are now in terms of where you have come from and where you are going to. And so doing you give a sense of yourself as a narrative identity that perdures and coheres over a lifetime. (Kearney, 2002, p. 4)*

### King's College Circle

*I enter the corner at a sharp 45° angle to the left, with my wheel stuttering on the turn as I gently pulse my brakes. Not only is my front tire only a millimeter from the rider in front of me, but my body is also in close contact with the other riders surrounding me. I am desperately trying to stay in visual contact with Sylvia Burka and Karen Strong, Canada's two top cyclists, but I am struggling with the technical aspects of the race as well as the overall race strategy. How did I get myself into this one? I am a triathlete, not a criterion specialist. Why did I choose King's College Circle on the University Toronto campus as my first criterion bike race?*

*I am more than three quarters of the way through the 40-lap figure eight course, with 30 cyclists still packed tightly together. It's enough to test anyone's stamina. I thought the field would thin out sooner, but because the course is short everyone has stayed bunched together. It is a great spectator course because you can see the whole race from any vantage point. I can even hear my coach calling out his advice and encouragement every time I pass his location.*

*Out of one corner and briskly into the next, I lean hard to the right; this time I am on the curbside of the road. This ebb and flow of direction and movement are all so tenuous when there are so many riders in the field. Anyone could go down in an instant and take the surrounding riders with her. As we wind our way around Hart House, I brake hard to let a rider muscle her way in. It's either that or we all go down. I get shuffled back in the pack. For an instant I can't see the front riders as they span out. But before I make my way around University College, Burka and Strong make their move and are out*

*of sight. I wonder if they planned this together ahead of time. I was coached on the "break," but living it is a different story. A small group counterattack and try to reel them in. In a split second decision I make the "jump" and join them and hang on for dear life. Each corner becomes more treacherous as the angle of my body lowers closer to the hard concrete. Because this course is so technical, with quick, sharp turns and short straight-aways, it's hard to catch the breakaway pair. I need to stay with this attack group if I am to finish on the podium.*

*With only two laps to go I make a decision to maneuver out in front and stay out in front. I can hear my coach's disapproval. "Draft!" he yells. But I know if I stay even one or two riders back I may not be able to pass them on the final sprint. I am a road rider, not a sprinter. I do not know how I will fare in the final sprint for third place.*

*The last time I pass the Medical Sciences building I take the lead. Six other riders are close on my tail. Every corner is the last. The adrenaline is pulsing through my body as I ride hard to maintain the lead in the final pack. I am putting out every ounce of energy I have. When I come around the final corner, Convocation Hall towers over me. I can see the finish line 70 meters straight ahead. I jump off my saddle and put my legs into high gear. Thrusting all my weight to the left and right with my bike moving in sync under me, I propel myself forward. Somehow I manage to keep the lead and finish first from the sprint pack. I may have come third overall, but I feel like a winner.*

Being an athlete has played a central role in my life. I was involved in a variety of individual and team sports, which dominated my story as I was growing up. I developed my natural athletic ability through dedicated practice, risk-taking, and perseverance. The commitment and success I experienced in sport built up my confidence and self-esteem both on and off the playing field. Being involved in sport helped me to get through what I perceived as the weaker academic part of my life. I was an average student, achieving average

results. Consequently it was through athletics that I entered into the world of postsecondary education. The team sport of basketball and the individual sport of triathlon brought me to the attention of the entrance assessors in both my Bachelor of Physical and Health Education degree and later on when I applied for my Bachelor of Education degree. I gained entrance to both programs through the athletic door.

When I made the decision to enter the Faculty of Education through the athletic door, I was not convinced that a teaching and learning life was for me. I secretly told myself that if I did not enjoy teaching, no matter how uncertain the future was I would find another career and do it quickly. I did not want to find myself trapped in a job that I did not take pleasure in, especially one that had such a profound effect on children's lives. However, much to my surprise, since I never wanted to "become" a teacher, I developed a profound love and passion for teaching and learning.

### **First Placement**

*"Hilary, we would like to offer you the job!"*

*My heart is beating hard in my chest as I utter, "Thank you for this opportunity!" I can hardly believe it. Me, teaching? I am beside myself. To think this is my first teaching job, and I am going to be teaching Girl's Physical and Health Education for the next 6 months. How am I going to manage? Can I do it? How did this happen? January comes quickly. As I walk into the school I begin to realize that starting an assignment almost halfway through the school year is a difficult time for any teacher to take over, but a rookie teacher, how will I cope? I wonder if I will be able to manage my classes. Will the students be able to relate to me? Will the staff help me? There is only one way to find out.*

*Three weeks pass, and I am beginning to feel more at ease. I need this prep this morning to regroup and plan for the next week. As I walk into the staffroom I am relieved I am all on my own. I have a lot of planning to do. I take out my daybook and start to match the days in the 6-day schedule with days in the week to see what classes I need to prepare lessons for. I hear the door open, and Mr. Roberts, the grade 3 teacher, enters and sits down across from me at the front table. Good, he has marking; he won't want to engage in idle chit-chat. He places his file folder on the table and takes out a stack of colourful paper with words neatly centered on the page. It looks like poetry. Up to this point, I have never had a one-on-one conversation with Mr. Roberts. I imagine the discomfort of being one of the only two people in the staff room forces him to attempt small talk. With his head buried in his marking he asks, "So how long have you been teaching?" Can he not tell that this is my very first placement?*

*"Only 3 weeks," I reply. He looks up from his marking and pauses for a moment. It's one of those long, pondering pauses. I stare back at him.*

*"No way!" he insists, "I thought you had been teaching for years!" In that instant I realize that what I am feeling on the inside is not translating outwards.*

I did not experience an epiphany on how best to teach, but instead I experienced an intuitive knowing. In this notion of teaching as intuitive, "intuition is not seen as a nefarious element of whim, but rather the intuitive nature of experience" (Tidwell & Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 85). It was the kind of knowing that was built on previous knowledge and experiences, and one that also took into account a visceral feeling that informed every fiber of my being, an embodied knowledge suggesting that I was on the right path to engage students in a meaningful way. Intuitive knowing in this sense is "the ability to see possible formal connections before one is able to prove them in any way"

(Bruner, 1986, p. 13). This relates to the philosophy of holism “which holds that all things are part of an indivisible unity or whole” (J. P. Miller, 1996, p. 20). My own belief around teaching for meaning by paying close attention to the social, emotional, and spiritual needs of the child is central to holism and to my practice. Put another way, it is my hope to engage students from more than a fragmented academic space where explicit factual knowledge is fostered to a space that allows embodied knowledge, that is “bodily action is not seen as a demonstration of internalized understandings; rather bodily action is understanding” (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 101) and may be understood socially, emotionally, and/or spiritually. I use the word spirituality throughout this dissertation not in a religious sense but “to call for attention in schools to the inner life; to the depth dimension of human of experience; to students’ longings for something more than an ordinary, material, and fragmented existence” (Kessler, 2000, p. x). This bodily understanding I seek to create with the students I work alongside acknowledges the emotional, social, and spiritual needs of a person as well as their academic needs which is part of the interconnected nature of holism and is partly nurtured through the cultivation of one’s intuition (Miller).

Intuitive knowing also provided me with the space to examine my personal and professional experience in order to become a better teacher.

According to Tidwell and Fitzgerald (2004):

The more informed, the more practiced one is, the more second nature the actions become. This intuitiveness is grounded in thoughtful

dynamic experience. Effective teaching, then, is this combination of reasoning through theoretical understandings combined with actions borne out of experience with specific contexts, specific dynamics, and specific interactions. This model includes contextual knowledge as the basis for teacher reflection. (p. 85)

How did I arrive at this intuitive knowing? Palmer (1998) states, “we teach who we are” (p. 2). Therefore, to understand myself is to understand the self who teaches. I knew that I could “conduct [an] inquiry according to the intuitions directing [me], as long as those intuitions had some grounding in the literature” (Drake, Elliott, & Castle, 1993, p. 293). Therefore, through the validation of others’ experiences via the literature, alongside my own experiences, I believe I can begin to understand how I arrived at this intuitive knowing.

Teaching from an ethic of care, compassion and happiness (Noddings, 1984, 2003) and ensuring that the child’s basic needs are met (Maslow, 1968) before I turn towards the academic side is a priority. This involves teaching the whole person. “From the perspective of an ethic of caring it is the person before us who becomes our central concern” (Ayers, 2001, p. 23). I did not need to go to the Faculty of Education to learn this. I already had an inkling that the best way for a child to reach his/her potential was to first meet their social, emotional, and spiritual needs, and through this approach I believed their intellectual abilities would flourish. I learned this in much the same way I felt I had to lead out during the last lap of the King’s College bike race in order to

become successful. During each novice experience, my first bicycle race, and my early years in the teaching and learning profession, intuition guided my actions. It was not until I honed my craft as a teacher through practice and then built a solid theoretical foundation through furthering my education that I could begin to understand the theoretical underpinnings of holistic teaching.

Teaching the whole child, mind, body, and spirit in unison, often seeped into my teaching and learning practice, but it was not until I deliberately set out to connect holistic theory in the context of today's educational climate of accountability and standardization that I realized its full potential. According to R. Miller (2000) because "holistic approaches reflect, to a rather significant extent, assumptions that are intuitive and implicit rather than clearly articulated...[I] need to be able to demonstrate that what [I] know intuitively can be discussed thoughtfully, carefully, and rationally" (p. 20). This is what I hope to do throughout this dissertation since teaching the whole person continues to guide my practice today as I teach and learn alongside beginning teachers.

#### **Journal March 5, 2007**

*Today I completed teaching my first Teacher Education course instructing the one-year Bachelor of Education students through the Foundational Methods course. For our final face-to-face class we took part in a communal circle meeting. Each person shared his or her philosophy of education and what s/he had learned throughout the academic year. Some students shared the metaphors they wrote about in their final philosophy of education paper such as farming, running, a ring and what it symbolizes, math, ringette, and baseball. Each metaphor mirrored the person who described his/her philosophy.*

*Some people shared their beliefs about children; every child can succeed, every child deserves to succeed, and children are our future. Many students described their future classrooms as places that they envision as safe, engaging, authentic, collaborative, beyond the curriculum, and fun.*

*A few people spoke with uncertainty, not knowing what their philosophy is yet, and one young woman questioned her Christianity in relation to the values and beliefs of the public education system. "How will I negotiate working in an environment where I have to suppress my fundamental values and beliefs?" she asked. Deep questions require the space that only silence can offer. We sat in silence pondering her concern.*

*One student told us his philosophy was grounded in the theory of John Dewey and Lev Vygotsky. He presented his theoretical framework immersed in constructivism, scaffolding, and the zone of proximal development. After he shared his philosophy with the group, he looked up from his paper and paused. Then he quietly shared his innermost thoughts, "I know who I want to be as a teacher," his eyes locking with mine, "but I know that I am not there yet." His honesty was compelling. I let my eyes wander around the circle. I could sense that many other students, including myself, were seriously considering what this young man had to say. How close am I to who I want to be as a teacher, I wondered. Do I live my values and beliefs grounded in my holistic philosophy of education in the classroom? (Journal entry, March 5, 2007)*

At this point in my career I have been engaged in the elementary, Graduate, Undergraduate, and Bachelor of Education programs. All three experiences, as both teacher and student, influenced my teaching and learning practice in some way. As an elementary teacher I practiced my craft through critical self-reflection and learned the art of teaching through trial and error. When engaged as a student in my Master's research I broadened my teaching practice by analyzing under what conditions various educational theories were most effective and why. I was able to connect my existing practice to



educational theory. As an instructor in both the Bachelor and Master of Education programs, I challenged myself and have been challenged by other instructors and students to reflect on where my core values as a teacher originated. In addition, I continue to challenge why I believe teaching holistically is one of the many best practices available for teacher practitioners.

Teaching the Foundational Methods course to beginning teachers has provided me with an opportunity to reflect on my own practice as an elementary school teacher in new and exciting ways since I often use my past experiences as a classroom teacher as a means of bringing educational theory to life. While immersed with future teachers on a day-to-day basis, I have been reminded that my own holistic teaching and learning practice, which was initially infused by intuition, has also been profoundly influenced by theory. “The holistic movement needs to balance its enthusiasm for ‘right brain’ insight with a deeper respect for ‘left brain’ explanation” (R. Miller, 2000, p. 20). My assumption is that the combination of practical experience with continual critical self-reflection, my intuitive disposition (right brain) and an infusion of knowledge in the way of educational theory (left brain), has provided me with a foundation to become an effective teacher.

I have a holistic worldview where I am in continual negotiation with the principles of holistic education: balance, inclusion, and connection (J. P. Miller, 2007) in order to offer the optimum teaching and learning environment I possibly can. The first principle of holistic education is finding a balance in one’s teaching and learning practice. I strive for balance between imparting

knowledge and cultivating creativity and imagination. I struggle to balance my expectations for product versus process-oriented learning. I endeavour to balance a rational linear approach to one that taps into one's intuition to name just a few. Through critical self-reflection I am in constant dialogue with the binaries I have created trying to balance them in my teaching and learning practice since I believe best practice contains elements of both.

The second principle of holistic education is inclusion. Within this principle I attempt to link the various educational orientations: transmission, transaction, and transformation whereby the transformation position is the most inclusive position and transmission is viewed as the smallest domain of the three. In the transmission position there is a one-way flow of information from teacher to student whereas "transformational learning acknowledges the wholeness of the child. The curriculum and child are no longer seen as separate but as connected"(J. P. Miller, 2007, p. 11). Offering transformational moments are best realized through experiential learning opportunities where learning can be "felt-understood in a bodily and sensuous way [offering] an emotional learning experience" (Jickling, 2009, p. 167). In this light, holism and experiential learning are connected in such a way that my "ontological attentiveness and its relationship with epistemology" (Jickling, p. 169) are guiding me towards a more effective and authentic teaching and learning practice.

The third principle of holistic education is making connections through relationships in order to "move from fragmentation to connectedness" (J. P.

Miller, 2007, p. 13). The various contexts that can be explored are the relationship between linear thinking and intuition, mind and body, domains of knowledge, self and community, and finally, relationship to the earth and to the soul (J. P. Miller). It is through critical self-reflection that I explore the different contexts, tensions, and/or binaries that exist in an educational setting.

The educational theories I am most aligned with are constructivism and humanism. Within this paradigm, I am able to engage in a teaching and learning practice that is holistic in nature focusing on the three principles of balance, inclusion and connection. Within this engagement I have utilized experiential learning moments whenever possible. I have found that teaching and learning holistically and offering experiential learning opportunities, are inextricably entangled. What is unveiled are authentic learning moments for students where transformational learning is a possibility. So if my philosophy is exemplary, how can I best reach teacher candidates, many who come with different backgrounds and different learning styles? Therefore, given what I know through my practical teaching experience and knowledge of theory, the questions that direct my research are:

1. How do I improve my practice so I meet the needs of beginning teacher candidates?
2. How do I become a more competent teacher educator that positively influences others?

The purpose of this self-study is to investigate my practice through autoethnography in order to explore if my philosophy is exemplary and how I

might best reach teacher candidates. Second, I explore these autoethnographic stories to see how I can deepen my identity as a teacher educator so that I can become a more effective one.

The significance of this study is:

1. To contribute to a growing body of teaching and learning approaches that balance the standards and accountability movement and,
2. To provide a methodological template for other teachers to examine their own practice through autoethnographic story—this examination may result in an improved teaching and learning practice.

This chapter provides the background information necessary to contextualize my story. I start with an exploration of the political climate that I was introduced to when I first entered the teaching profession. I use two vignettes, *Change Agent* and *The Street Party* to highlight my role as a teacher, and follow with a discussion supporting the need for teachers to work towards self-understanding. The remainder of the chapter examines worldwide trends in education with a look at educational practice and policy and ends with a discussion of the subtle shift in the new curriculum that is beginning to emerge from the Ministry of Education in Ontario today.

### **Entering the Profession**

When I entered the teaching profession in the 1990s, the political climate in Ontario had shifted from a progressive approach to education to a more rigorous standards-based approach. The debate about educational reform was undergoing a major overhaul. The Conservative government passed Bill

160, the Education Quality Improvement Act, which was essentially an economic policy that removed a billion dollars from Ontario's education budget, none of which were reinvested into education (O'Sullivan, 1999; Volante, 1997). Under this legal accountability mechanism, Bill 160 took control of education away from the local community, for example taxation and funding powers of school boards, and gave it to the elected party. The Conservative party's "goal was to centralize its power over provincial education by reducing the authority of school boards and teacher federations and to assert more control over provincial curriculum, report cards, and provincial testing" (O'Sullivan, p. 320). A provincial policy emerged as a dominant influence over education. What could I do, as a practicing teacher, to make sure my student's academic as well as social and emotional well-being did not get subsumed under this political policy?

Concurrently, the government also mandated province-wide testing at grades 3, 6, 9, and 10 and implemented a province-wide standards-based curriculum for grades 1-12 with the intent that all teachers in Ontario would be teaching the same subject topic on the same day. Even though the scheduling of when curriculum would be delivered was in the hands of the government, how a curriculum would be delivered was in the hands of the individual teacher. Therefore, deep knowledge about learning theories and under what conditions children learn best is where I could perhaps make a difference. I knew I wanted to become the most competent teacher learner possible and this desire is at the heart of my research question, how do I improve my practice? The proposal to

create a uniform schedule of the daily implementation of the standardized curriculum across the province reinforced the dominant influence over education. However, within this uniformity was a living, breathing human being, me, a teacher. I believed that how I approached my teaching and learning practice could potentially make a difference in not only the academic lives of the students I work with, but also give me space to seamlessly address their social, emotional and spiritual needs as well. Therefore, interrogating how I can improve my teaching and learning practice became a viable motivation for me to pursue.

Today in Ontario, the political climate has shifted. Since 2006, under the Liberal leadership, changes began to surface such as the development and implementation of Character Education, Arts Education, Daily Physical Activity, and Environmental Education curriculum to name a few. The new Liberal policy with its shift towards an educational approach that addresses the physical, social, and emotional needs of the child, in my point of view, is bound to have a positive effect over the long term.

When I look back over the 1990s I realize that it was a turbulent time politically to enter the teaching profession, but for better or for worse, this was the decade when my teaching story began. I learned how to teach amidst the challenging influences prevalent in the system. I cannot remember the exact moment I became disenchanted with the political system and the centralization of its power over provincial education. Within the first 5 years of my teaching career I experienced firsthand what I perceived as an inefficient top-down

implementation of the province-wide curriculum and the implementation of flawed province-wide testing. In addition, I witnessed poor long-term planning with regards to the reduction of high school from 5 to 4 years. I was not alone in my opinion. I also participated in a 2-week teacher strike to demonstrate our collective disapproval of Bill 160.

All in all, the turbulent nature of teaching throughout the 1990s tested my resiliency in my new profession. I felt out of balance. Did not all teachers feel this way? At this point in my young career I made a silent promise to myself that the needs of a child would come first and reside at the center of my practice. I was battling internally, fighting hard not to succumb to the standards and accountability movement which was promising to reduce my teaching practice to a pedagogy of fragmentation, covering the curriculum, and teaching to the test. My intuitive nature and a growing understanding of who I was becoming as a teacher were at odds with the political agenda of the day. It seemed to me that “good teaching [could not] be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (Palmer, 1998, p. 10). Didn’t all teachers want to teach from this place of identity and integrity? Intuition, knowing myself, and acting with integrity guided my teaching practice. It led me to a place where placing emphasis on the social, emotional, and spiritual needs of a child was necessary regardless of what the political, legal, and bureaucratic accountability story of the day might be. Much to my surprise, it also led me to be seen as a teacher who swam against the current.

### Change Agent

*"You're a change agent!" my Principal flatly stated as she opened her window even though it was a frigid February morning.*

*"No, I'm not," I insisted, "I am just curious and like to try new things."*

*"That is not how I see you, or how others see you for that matter," she continued, "you are viewed as someone who not only has a desire to learn, but you are also a person who puts that knowledge into action. I see you as someone who effects change. A teacher who leads by example." I let her words sink in.*

*"I have never seen myself as a change agent," I mused, "I just see myself as someone who is curious and willing to test a theory."*

When I look back on my career with new eyes, after my Principal had openly and honestly shared her insight into how I was viewed, it seemed to me that I had made small waves everywhere I have traveled. These waves stemmed from my beliefs and values central to my practice of teaching experientially while also paying close attention to the social, emotional, and spiritual needs of the child. Why do I require more from teaching than simply being the agent in the transmission of knowledge? According to Eisner (2002), "the skill of a good teacher does not consist of only theory and technique. Sensitivity to self and others and the ability to communicate and to inspire students are essential" (p. 328). This is the kind of teacher I aspired to become as I continued my journey upstream.

During my first Teacher Evaluation the Vice-Principal noted in her report that I "epitomized Schön's Reflective Practitioner." At the time I had never heard of the term Reflective Practitioner (Schön, 1983), nor was I



familiar with Donald Schön, but I distinctly remember becoming curious, even excited by the notion that my Vice-Principal, whom I respected, felt that I epitomized Schön's theory. When I met my Vice-Principal to review her evaluation of my teaching practice, she advised me to pursue a Master of Education degree so that I could come to a deeper understanding of my teaching practice and to name what I did instinctively when I taught. Once again, intuitive knowing led me into the world of academia and the subsequent naming of the lived intuitive processes I experienced in my early teaching career.

Once the new standards-based curriculum had been fully implemented I experimented with the notion of integration through experiential learning. I spent hours cross-referencing the curriculum and found connections between the learning outcomes in the various documents. I created experiential performance tasks that would allow me to integrate the core subjects I taught. Language Arts integrated seamlessly with History and Geography, but finding ways to integrate Mathematics on a daily basis was more demanding. I enjoyed the challenge of making learning interesting for the young people by relating what they learned in the classroom and connecting it to the world outside the classroom. While facilitating and implementing these ideas, my projects often brought diverse student populations together. For example, when I taught in a school where a segment of the population was in the French Immersion stream or in a segregated gifted class, which by their nature often isolated these student groups, I tried to promote opportunities for collaboration between these specialty classes and the regular school population in order to build one

cohesive school community. One year I had an idea for a collaborative project that would include every student in the Intermediate division, including the four French Immersion classes.

### **The Street Party**

*"Hey what do you think if we study the past millennia as a whole intermediate division?" I asked excitedly. "Amongst us we have 16 intermediate classes. Let's all have breakfast together to discuss the possibility!" Three teachers could not attend our breakfast meeting so, to be fair, each teacher pulled a piece a paper out of a hat with a number indicating the decade their homeroom class would study. Some decades ended up being duplicated. We picked a decade out of the hat for the three teachers who did not attend.*

*Everyone was excited and full of the creative ideas that I find so invigorating when a group collaborates together. We decided that after first term report cards and interviews were completed, each class would spend 3 weeks immersed in their chosen decade. Topics such as fads, music, drama, historical events, scientific inventions, and fashion were explored. We decided to have a classroom door-decorating contest too. Each class had to create a door that represented an image from their particular decade.*

*At the end of the unit, we had a Street Party Celebration where, on the final afternoon, all the students, parents, and teachers came to our street party. It was a memorable learning celebration. All the students came dressed in clothing that reflected their decade. My homeroom class researched the 1950s. Poodle skirts, white t-shirts and jeans, and pillbox hats were worn. I rented an authentic diner costume, put on some roller skates, and placed a big wad of chewing gum in my mouth. "Can I take your order?" The young people presented their work and took turns visiting the other classrooms. We saw an exquisite dance that reflected the Depression. The student was dressed in black from head to toe surrounded in darkness, with one stark spotlight shining on her as she danced in and out of the shadows. We could sense the suffering of*

*the Great Depression. In one of the two 1960s classrooms, a giant Twister board was created with coloured circles taped to the floor of the classroom. Visitors were invited to play in one giant game. It was a lot of fun. In the other 1960s room there were hippy protestors with signs, "Peace, not war!" walking outside their classroom protesting the Vietnam War. Even though the two classes had picked the same decade, each class created a different atmosphere for the 1960s, extended from their own research.*

*Visitors were flowing through the upper hall learning about the past 100 years through the eyes of 13- and 14-year-old young people—except for one class. Only one teacher chose not to participate in this activity. Even as I write about this experience today, years later, my heart is filled with sadness. Why were these students not encouraged to experience the richness of our global history over the past millennia by fostering their imagination with the creation of projects that reflect their genuine interest and creativity? Was this type of learning environment foreign to this teacher's teaching style? As the teacher who initiated this project, was my propensity to teach using innovative techniques considered a threat to this teacher's practice? What could I have done differently to bring this class into the project? Why do I care?*

In my experience through discussions with teachers at professional development workshops, at leadership courses, in academic classrooms, and in school staffrooms, many teachers resort to teaching for transmission of information in fear of not covering the entire mandatory curriculum due to the vast amount of curriculum. Teachers often run out of time due to the amount of curriculum to cover and/or heading into a reporting phase of the school year and, therefore, resort to teaching for transmission. In either situation, current classroom conditions initiated by the Ministry of Education are maintained. It would seem then that the problem might not lie solely on the type of teaching

approach adopted by the teacher but also on societal, political, and cultural pressure to maintain the status quo.

Reflecting on my lived experiences both inside and outside of the classroom may offer an understanding of why I attempt to reach a child on more than just an academic level regardless of the pressure to conform to the political agenda of standardization and covering the curriculum. In addition, reflecting on my lived experiences while upholding professional standards of practice may also uncover how I came to an epistemological and ontological perspective that promotes a learning environment that fosters more than solely an academic milieu in spite of the many teachers around me who, I believe, have succumbed to the system and who fragment learning opportunities in order to cover the curriculum and teach to the test.

According to Ayers (2001), “of all the knowledge teachers need to draw on, self-knowledge is most important (and least attended to)” (p. 124). It requires us to have a “serious encounter with autobiography” (Ayers, p. 124). Taking my cue from Ayers, I have created an emerging self-study method by examining my autobiography through the writing of selected lived educational experiences. The writing process and the subsequent interpretation will allow me to explore my lived experiences in a deeper, more sustained manner. By this I mean through writing I describe an experience and then in an attempt to enrich that experience I mine its meaning through hermeneutics in an “attempt to determine the meaning embodied in them” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 38).

### **Self-Understanding**

This self-study is not about losing my faith in teaching, or an act of resistance, but in fact the opposite. It is about how I have somehow managed to endure the political forces that underpin today's educational system and how I have attempted to negotiate my career path so that I teach in a way that, in my experience, has brought meaning to the students I work with at both the elementary and university level. It is about self-understanding. More simply put it is the ability to deconstruct my lived experiences and make them more intelligible in relation to the teaching a learning practice I have embraced one that I believe aligns with my identity and my integrity as a teacher.

If one "teaches the self" (Palmer, 1998), it is "crucial that teacher educators engage in rigorous self-study in order to develop self-understanding and an understanding of education for others" (Kitchen, 2005, p. 18). I will inquire into the ways I may have been successful or not successful in trying to maintain a teaching practice that recognizes the many and varied needs of a child. I do this in spite of external constraints that make it easier and/or necessary to teach for transmission learning where "there is a one-way flow...of skills and knowledge...[and] little or no opportunity to reflect on or analyse the information" (J.P. Miller, 2007, p. 10).

In choosing to maintain a teaching practice that recognized more than just the academic needs of a child within a standardized, outcomes-based milieu, I often found myself challenging the status quo. The status quo in this instance may encompass teachers who believe in the standards movement and

therefore teach to the test, teachers who do not believe in the standards movement but who do not want to challenge the directive and therefore quietly adopt the system being promoted, and administration at both the school and board level, who are upholding the government mandate of standardization. Ayers (2004) has suggested, good teachers must challenge the status quo by equally challenging the imposition of labels and tests employed to describe student learning with the goal of ranking youngsters in a hierarchy of winners and losers. As a result of challenging what I deemed was the status quo, at times I was viewed as a change agent. The notion that I am a change agent will be explored, specifically examining how I can become a more effective change agent, one who positively influences others, both seasoned and beginning teachers, in my role as a teacher educator. Throughout this examination, I will be exploring how I can improve my teaching and learning practice as I continue to engage with theory and integrate it into my practice.

As I continue to work through the process I will story my lived experiences and bring to light “nodal moments” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 16) that reflect my beliefs and values through an emerging method that will further my understanding of my own ontological and epistemological beliefs. According to Ayers (2001):

The challenge of teaching is to decide who you want to be as a teacher, what you care about and what you value, and how you will conduct yourself in classrooms with students. It is to name yourself as a

teacher, knowing that institutional realities will only enable that goal in part (if at all) and that the rest is up to you. (p. 22)

Central to this self-study is an exploration of who I am becoming while critically reflecting on my past through autoethnography. I examine how various experiences have informed my practice and allowed me to meet the needs of an educational system that is currently driven by outcomes, numbers, and warehoused data. Children are at the heart of education, and yet the changes inherent in policy, funding, and curriculum deeply affect their learning experience. How will beginning teachers attempt to reach a child's social, emotional, moral, cognitive, physical, and spiritual needs as well as their academic needs within a system that is single-mindedly focused on academic performance?

I fully recognize that not all beginning teachers have had experiences in their lives that support a holistic teaching and learning practice where balance, inclusion, and connection is the aim of education. In this type of teaching and learning environment teachers often use experiential learning opportunities in order to satisfy their aim and in doing so the student has the opportunity to feel learning. It becomes embodied. Or it may be the case that beginning teachers may not even ascribe to this type of teaching philosophy but rather may be drawn to a philosophy that is more essentialist in nature, meaning they may want to "stress what they believe to be the essential knowledge and skills (often termed 'the basics') that productive members of our society need to know" (Parkay, Harcastle Stanford, Vaillancourt and Stephens, 2007, p. 78). With

this tangible possibility in mind, what will I need to know with regards to learning theories? Furthermore, how will I implement these theories in my Foundational Methods course so that beginning teachers may begin to come to a better understanding of their own identity not only as teachers but as learners as well? It is my hope that with this self-knowledge beginning teachers will be able to make informed decisions about their own teaching and learning practice that will enhance a student's well-being as well as their academic performance.

My ambition during the research process is to critically reflect on my lived experiences as an athlete, a practicing teacher and learner, and as a teacher educator/academic and, through interpretation, explore, learn, and understand as much as I can about my identity in relation to my teaching practice and my role as someone who brings forth change. However, an important quality of any self-study is that it is not solitary in nature. There is an implicit "other" out there whom this work addresses. An assumption I have made about the reader of this work is that s/he will want to reflect on who s/he is in relation to his/her teaching practice. This way, the reader is an interactive participant, always questioning, searching, and deciding who s/he wants to become as a teacher.

At the same time, this study is for teachers who are seeking a way to arrive at a better understanding of self. After all, to know thyself, and all one's biases, perceptions, capabilities, and so forth, is to know one's teaching self. Alongside the intent of making a difference in teacher education, through my teaching of the Foundational Methods course and demonstrating how teaching to meet the many and varied needs of a child can be an effective way to



negotiate the standards movement, is the question, “how is the learning, useable, applicable, and informing?” (Kosnik, 2005, p. 217). By blurring the boundaries between the various forms of inquiry, it is my hope that I will be able to integrate my past with the present and look ahead and “anticipate, if not plan out” (Atkinson, 1995, p. 52) how to improve my teaching practice, come to a deeper understanding of self, and effect positive change within every level of an educational setting I find myself immersed in.

The literature that has informed my views on educational policy and practice, self-study, autoethnography, and narrative inquiry offers a kind of palimpsest upon which I superimpose my self-study. It weaves its way through each section in Chapter One.

The remainder of this chapter provides background information necessary to situate my story. I examine the political climate that I find myself still navigating since the first day I began teaching. In addition, I highlight the subtle shift in the approach to new curriculum that is beginning to emerge today in Ontario. In Chapter Two, I discuss the elements that interconnect the theoretical framework that holds the self-study together. I follow this with a discussion surrounding the limitations of a self-study, next I outline the criteria for assessing the writing found in this self-study, and last, describe the method, or various data collection techniques, I will be utilizing in Chapter Three.

### **Background of the Problem**

*“No standardized test for students can ever inform us of a teacher’s enthusiasm, caring, or belief that students can be successful—three factors that have an enormous effect on student achievement and self esteem” (DiGiulio, 2010, p. 114).*

*Worldwide Trends in Educational Reform*

In response to global economic competitiveness, where “knowledge has become the competitive asset and advantage of industrial nations” (O’Sullivan, 1999, p. 311), core curriculum subjects have been at the center of educational reform in many parts of the world including Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States (Delandshere & Petrosky, 2004). The realities of technology and the global economy, as well as the notion that knowledge is a commodity, have stimulated a global educational reform movement that is “converging towards uniformity, conformity, and compliance” (Delandshere & Petrosky, p. 1). Fueling this convergence is the standards movement.

According to Roth (1996):

The movement in general may be characterized by several salient features. Among these are a deep-seated and growing distrust of teacher education; a change in the locus of control, with national policy emerged as a dominant influence; restructuring of licensing and governance; and reconceptualizing the nature of standards, with performance and outcomes assuming a preeminent role. (p. 242)

In Ontario, a distrust of teachers, a change in the locus of control, and a reconceptualization of the nature of standards with performance and outcomes assuming a preeminent role emerged during my formative years as a teacher (O’Sullivan, 1999; Volante, 1997). In addition, the Conservative government shifted the debate from global economic competitiveness and interdependent global needs to one about “rigor” in education (O’Sullivan, p. 319). Rigor

suggests the application of precise and exacting standards which are healthy benchmarks for our students to strive for. We want our students to excel and succeed. But rigor also suggests rigidity which leaves little room for flexibility and choice in the curriculum to be delivered. Rigor also suggests an experience of hardship and great difficulty and is that the kind of educational system we want our students to experience? This leads into a discussion regarding educational practice and policy in Ontario and the influence of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2002) implemented by our “neighbour to the south,” the United States. With the United States being our closest and overwhelmingly largest trading partner and a leading force in educational research, Canadians tend to watch closely its developing policies and practices.

### *Educational Practice and Policy*

The current trend towards standardization, accountability, and boosting province-wide test scores as a measure of student success permeates the educational landscape in Ontario and across the globe. “Its driving idea is that the purpose of schooling is to prepare children for competent entry into the economic life of a community” (Postman, 1995, p. 27). Economic reproduction is perpetuated throughout our educational system. For example, it is seen in the hierarchical social relationships between administration, teachers, and students where economic reproduction is reflected in vertical authority lines. In addition, the lack of control over curriculum content by teachers and students, the motivation of school achievement through a grading system (earning the

highest marks possible), and external rewards also all contribute to reproduce our economic system within the educational structure (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Education and economic productivity go hand in hand with the promise of a well-paying job as a reward for postsecondary education.

In 2002, President George W. Bush signed an education reform bill entitled No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2002). The purpose of the NCLB is to “close the achievement gaps and aim for 100 percent student proficiency by 2014” (Guilfoyle, 2006, p. 8). In response to the NCLB legislation, school districts in the United States dramatically expanded the role of standardized testing. The law required testing annually in reading and math between grades 3 and 8, with science testing beginning in 2007 (Guilfoyle, p. 8). Will Canada follow the United States and implement testing at every grade?

In a standards-based worldview, learning is seen as existing in forms that can be measured and quantified. The following are some possible positive outcomes for raising our expectations for students. According to Grennon Brooks (2004), assessments generate improved student learning and better teacher instruction. In addition, standards (expectations) and testing provide students with more challenging work so they can meet the “demands of a new economy” (Darling-Hammond, 2004, p. 1047). Raising expectations for students also implies that all students can improve academically through effort. Therefore, inherent in the standards movement is the notion that all children have potential and that standardized testing can improve academic standing. In

short, the standards movement has opened the door and empowered students with the belief that they can succeed by extending this opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge at grades, 3, 6, 9, and 10.

Standardized testing can also be viewed as a mechanism to gather information for an accountability system—it is not the system itself (Darling-Hammond, 2004). According to Haycock (2006), the biggest benefit of the NCLB policy is that “there are no more invisible kids. NCLB has shone a spotlight on the academic performance of poor minority students, English language learners, and students with disabilities—students whose lagging achievement had previously been hidden” (p. 38). Therefore, this information-gathering spurs other reforms such as mobilizing more resources for student learning; more course offerings; an increase in intensive teacher preparation and professional development for teachers; and more equalized resources for schools (O’Day & Smith cited in Darling-Hammond). In addition, the accountability movement also includes “investments in teacher knowledge and skill, organization of schools to support teacher and student learning, and systems of assessment that drive curriculum reform and teaching improvements” (Darling-Hammond, p. 1047).

The potential positive outcomes of standardized testing sound good in theory; however, what the testing has prompted in many cases is teaching to cover the curriculum and “extended instruction targeted to the test” (Grennon Brooks, 2004, p. 10). The curriculum often gets narrowed as tests come to define what subject knowledge gets taught (Eisner, 2001). This leaves public

schools accountable and “under excruciating pressure to improve test results – often at the expense of meaningful learning” (Kohn, 2005, p. 20). As Howard Gardner observed (cited in Kohn, 2004, p. 48), “the greatest enemy of understanding is ‘coverage.’” In this “banking concept” of education, students are “receiving, filing, and storing the deposits” (Freire, 1970, p. 72). Teachers impart knowledge, and their students become the receptacles receiving their wisdom. In the “receptacles to be filled” approach (Freire, p. 72), there is no discussion or debate or dialogue surrounding the curriculum that is being imparted. It is strictly a transmission approach with the “memorization of a bunch o’ facts” (Kohn, 2004, p. 4) that are soon forgotten after the standardized test has been administered, which leaves a child with surface learning at best. A standardized curriculum is poured into the student, and a predetermined, controlled amount of knowledge is brought forth reflected in a test score. This “means-end model” (Eisner, 2005, p. 14) forms the exemplar for school improvement.

Under this rubric teachers are not encouraged to be “flexibly purposive” (Eisner, 2005, p. 14) and open to new or unforeseen opportunities. According to Eisner (2001), “the result is an approach to reform that leaves little room for surprise, for imagination, for improvisation, or for the cultivation of productive idiosyncrasy” (p. 368). There is also little room for diversity and creativity. Instead teachers are urged to follow a linear model, and if they do not reach their goals they adjust the strategies they use, but the goals remain constant. Does this narrow vision of education leave any room for teaching the

whole child? Stated another way, is there space or time in the school day for a child to wonder or to “uncover an element of poetic magic” (Lewis, 2006, p. 22), or is there space for a teacher to foster “energized learning” (Intrator, 2004, p. 23) or time to genuinely get to know his/her students so that s/he could “use this knowledge of the personal to create bridges between [his/her] students and course content” (Intrator, p. 23)?

Teaching for meaning “involves everything from self-reflection to emotional regulation, from imaginative expression to empathic understanding” (Hart, 2009, p. 6). It may provide teachers with another way to approach the teaching and learning environment within the outcomes-based milieu that surrounds teaching today. According to Hart, the elements listed above:

Do not take away from the acquisition of information and the mastery of skills. Instead growing evidence suggests just the contrary, that performance is intimately tied to emotional well-being, sense of community, sense of meaning and purpose, emotional regulation, self-reflection, and so forth. (p. 6)

Yet most teachers do not teach using this approach for fear of not addressing all the curriculum that the Ministry of Education mandates, or they do not teach attending to the social, emotional, and physical needs of the child due to their propensity to “teach to the test” (Posner, 2004) in order to ensure high standardized test results.

I did not teach to the test because there was no province-wide grade 8 test to take up any of our teaching and learning time. However, 3 years ago I

moved schools halfway through the academic year and took over a grade 6/7 split for half of my teaching assignment. At the end of April, I was informed that the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) province-wide standardized test would be administered. It was only then that I realized I was teaching a grade that would be tested. It was too late for me to teach to the test, since EQAO testing was upon us. Perhaps I did not realize it was a testing year due to the move or because I had been teaching grade 8 for so long, or perhaps being so passionate about teaching the whole child I would not even consider fragmenting the teaching and learning process and spend time teaching to the test. Either way I did not teach to the test that year.

When I checked my students' results the following school year, their results were on par with their final report card marks. I do not know if they would have achieved a higher standing on the EQAO test if I had taught to the test and drilled my students on similar test questions for a few weeks working up to the EQAO testing week. However, I do know that I tried my best to maintain a teaching and learning environment that first met the social, emotional, and spiritual needs of my students before I focused on their academic needs.

Falling under the rubric of Economic Utility (Postman, 1995) and global economic competitiveness (O'Sullivan, 1999) is the belief that in order to improve the economy, test scores must be raised to produce economically productive workers. In this system of education competition is valued. Testing that emphasizes memorization and regurgitation of information becomes a



necessary skill in the demonstration of one's proficiency. High test scores supposedly measure one's proficiency; therefore, performing well on tests result in high overall academic averages. High averages are often the only prerequisite for meeting an entrance acceptance standard for many university programs. Often there are limited spaces in programs, so competition between students is a natural result of this entrance process. As a result, learners become passive recipients of information that is taught in fragmented, isolated, independent sections. Learning is not experienced as an integrated whole, connected, and dependent, but rather it is experienced as a competitive engagement where striving for the highest grade possible is the goal. A rich curriculum with hands-on experiential learning opportunities and meaningful relationships being developed becomes secondary.

Many educators believe that teaching for meaning is incompatible with standardized tests, when in fact there is evidence that progressive, holistic education is at least as effective as traditional education in promoting academic achievement and often is more so (Kohn, 1999; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2004). Inherent in the approach to teach for meaning (Hart, 2001; McTighe, Seif, & Wiggins 2004; Noddings, 2005) is the notion that the whole child is valued as important, and that s/he feels valued as a person first and foremost is what truly empowers students to want to learn. This, in turn, leads to a more meaningful objective such as knowing how to think. What do we want from education—economically productive workers, students who can think for themselves, or both? This leaves me questioning:

- What is the purpose of education?
- Is it possible for teachers to consider addressing the social, emotional, and physical needs of a child under these circumstances?
- What does it mean to educate the whole child?

In October 2006, the Ontario Ministry of Education (MOE) unveiled its *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools* discussion paper. The paper gave a detailed overview of the Character Development curriculum, its objectives, and how it will be implemented. It came at a time when, according to the MOE, all measures are on the rise. For example, students were improving in their academic achievement, and the school dropout rate was down. The Character Development initiative recognized that a quality education included the education of the heart as well as the head; it included a focus on the whole person—cognitive, affective, and behavioural domains of learning (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). This initiative, which as stated, included the heart as well as the head, differs from my vision of educating the whole person by meeting the social, emotional, spiritual, and cognitive needs of a child. However, that being said, it seems to be headed in the right direction. It provided a common language for all stakeholders who are involved in promoting and implementing Character Development education.

The implementation of the Character Development education process included: consulting with boards, establishing resource teams, a Provincial

Symposium, providing funding and conducting research on the effectiveness of the implementation and effectiveness of the Character Development Initiative, assisting boards in aligning policies, practices, and programs to reflect the implementation of Character Development, and last; developing guidelines for data collection and analysis for assessing the impact of the Character Development Initiative (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006).

The implementation process is comprehensive, addressing all the major players in the educational process. It would seem from this list that for the MOE, educating the whole child—cognitive, affective and behavioural domains of learning should be taught explicitly within our classrooms. “The government is spending \$2 million to start, weaving such values as respect and honesty into the provincial curriculum over the next few years” (*Ontario to push*, Oct. 16, 2006). A lot of time, effort, and money has been spent on the organization of a curriculum that I believe should be implicit in all our actions at all times as educators and not set aside for a 50-minute time slot one period per week. All stakeholders in education should be upholding and modeling values and beliefs such as the aforementioned respect and honesty.

I agree with the MOE that to educate all children successfully we need to focus on the whole person; I find it hard to believe that it should take 2 years to implement values such as care, respect, trust, and integrity, values that should be implicitly modeled on a daily basis regardless of the Character Development Initiative. I also find it interesting that at present the MOE finds the climate ripe for such an initiative now that the students are improving in their

achievement. Could it be that the educational movement over the past 11 years towards standardization and accountability structured the educational process in such a way that it led educators to teach in a more traditional transmission style and pushed teachers away from teaching the whole child? Could it be that students have experienced an educational system that focused on the academics and left out the affective and behavioural domains of learning? At the end of this implementation process, how is the government going to collect the data needed to ascertain if the Character Development Initiative is a success? With another test?

A covering message, written by Dr. Avis Glaze, the Chief Student Achievement Officer, accompanied the Character Development Initiative Document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). Her plea for success was all encompassing:

This initiative will only be successful if all partners share the responsibility for the character development of students. We call upon all partners in education—students, teachers, principals, supervisory officers, parents, guardians, secretaries, custodians, school councils, bus drivers, trustee organizations, federations, councils, unions, business and community leaders, social service agencies, faith communities and all those who either work or volunteer in our schools or have a vested interest in the quality of our education system and in the caliber of our graduates, to join with us in nurturing the best of the human and

universal qualities that our graduates need to be successful in school and in life.

Dr. Glaze includes a good portion of society. Therefore, for the initiative to be successful more than just individuals in the field of education should be involved in the process. It seems to me that as members of a society, we are all responsible to uphold and implement values and beliefs that encourage and invite the values of trust and respect for all our partners. Why wait to implement character development honouring these values then?

#### *What is My Worldview?*

I can remember the exact moment in July 2000 when Professor Kirkwood posed the question, “What is your worldview?” in his *Introduction to Research* course. He continued, stating that when we had that figured out, then, and only then, would we know what type of research to conduct. It was such a simple question. I knew what kind of information brought meaning to my world, and I knew what kind of information brought out my skepticism. My worldview is qualitative in nature which appeals to my ontological and epistemological worldview. By qualitative worldview I came to realize that I learned experientially through my connection to Nature. For example, while walking with my Mom in Coronation Park at 5 years of age, I was immersed in the natural world. With my Mom as my guide, seamless connections for experiencing language by using my senses when in contact with nature became a possibility. In addition to Nature, first person story telling became a qualitative way of knowing for me. Jerome Bruner (2002) suggests, “to

narrate' derives from both 'telling' (*narrare*) and 'knowing in some particular way' (*gnarus*)—[and that] the two [are] tangled beyond sorting”(p. 27). This suggests that writing my way into being using what Bruner (1986) calls the “narrative mode” will not be an easy task since simultaneously, I will be telling my story, through the mode of writing my story narratively, and the two are *tangled beyond sorting*.

Tangled beyond sorting is reminiscent of Creswell's (2002) description of qualitative research as “an intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colours, different textures, and various blends of material” (p. 13). This metaphor beautifully captures the intricacies that qualitative research presents, which is that qualitative research is not easily or simply explained. It is beyond sorting. However, within myriad threads, colours, textures, and blends, there are opportunities to find meaningful ways into the topic being explored.

An exploration of my lived experiences, the telling of my stories, and descriptions of my experiences in nature will perhaps provide the loom that will allow me to weave a pattern that has never been seen before, thus breathing life into my identity as teacher and as a change agent. According to Van Manen (1990), “lived experience is the breathing of meaning” (p. 36). As I reflect on an experience in my life, I start the weaving process with splashes of colour in the various threads when I give memory to that event, interpret it, and assign meaning. I also tell stories about my experiences, which provides the texture in the weave of the material. The qualitative nature of reviewing, relating, and

reflecting upon the characters, plot, and setting helps me to provide my life with “meaning, unity, and purpose” (McAdams, 1993, p. 6). There is an intimate connection between lived experiences and giving voice to those lived experiences through story. I also learn in relationship with Nature, which allows the blending of the material into a tightly interwoven pattern of interconnectivity. I believe that everything exists in relationship to everything else and that it is the nature of living things to move, change, and transform. I am part of this interconnected web of life. The narrative nature of my worldview informs my life and the world I envision for myself and offers myriad colour, texture, and blends from which to learn and grow.

My narrative worldview is reflected in the way I learn and interpret the world around me. Two diverse events in my recent life history have had a profound impact on my life as a teacher and as a change agent. The first event I describe is an encounter with Nature when I embarked on a Vision Quest, also called the Animas Quest, in the summer of 2005 in Utah. It is also named the Animas Quest after the Animas Valley Institute that supports the Vision Quest program. One of the outcomes of my quest found its way into the heart of my school community. The second event is a description of the Council Process, now simply referred to as a Circle Meeting, which was the focal point of the qualitative Action Research project I conducted for my Master of Education degree. Since 2002, the Circle Meeting has become a seminal part of my teaching and learning practice which has woven its way from an elementary setting into my adult teaching and learning teacher education environment.

Both events, the Vision Quest and the implementation of Circle Meetings, continue to influence my life as a teacher, a change agent, and human being and will be described in further detail.

### *Vision Quest*

In the summer of 2005, I embarked on a modern-day Vision Quest through the Animas Valley Institute. This contemporary embodiment of the ancient vision quest is a dynamic wilderness rite for people who are seeking greater clarity regarding life purpose and meaning. I am not culturally appropriating the Vision Quest as my own, but rather I have embraced what the experience had to offer. At the time, my academic work was leading me towards a self-study, and I was drawn to the process of the Vision Quest with the hope that it would guide me to insights about myself that were hidden. It was my hope that this experience would aid me in the researching of the self. What I did not know was how profound this experience would be for me.

As a rite of initiation or renewal, Vision Quest or Animas Quest (Plotkin, 2003) takes the form of a ceremonial descent to soul, uncovering and retrieving the passion and wisdom of the heart and exposing the nature of the gift that is mine alone to bring to the world. Throughout the experience I was empowered to continue to direct my life onto a path of both personal fulfillment and genuine service to others. In this way, the quest served as a modern rite of initiation—not into any social, religious, or spiritual group, but into my own soul and into deeper levels of authentic adulthood. Put another way, I was given the opportunity to explore who I am in relation to nature and consider ways I can



embody what I had learned to bring back in order to be of service to others. As a rite of passage, the quest facilitates the transition through a major crossroads of life. This time of change and disruption is unavoidable in our lives and pivotal, often being the necessary doorway to all future growth and self-empowerment. My transition from teacher to teacher educator/academic and the process of writing about this transition played a role in my descent to soul.

The Animas Vision Quest was a guided experience that incorporated interwoven practices of ancient traditions with the self-development tools of modern depth psychology and ecopsychology. The quest facilitated a life passage and self-discovery by temporarily displacing everyday consciousness through five primary means:

1. Solitude for 3 days and nights,
2. Fasting (i.e., drinking water only) during the solitary time period,
3. Being fully exposed to and enfolded by the form and forces of Nature,
4. Enacting a series of ceremonial processes such as sweat lodge, trance dance, and drumming, and last,
5. Employing a set of practices that supported me in crossing into the mysteries of nature and psyche. Such practices included: soul centric dream work, the way of council, the art of mirroring, conversations with sacred other, and deep imagery.

Most quests led by the Animas Valley Institute (Plotkin, 2003) take 12 days, 8 of which are spent in the wilderness but only 3 in complete solitude.

Preceding my time of solitude were 5 full days of preparation activities and teachings that enhanced my ability to benefit from the quest.

During the 5 preparation days, I worked with dreams, poetry, deep imagery, ceremonial drumming and dance, dialogues with nature, the way of the council, and other practices that helped me to separate from my everyday life and access my deeper self. The heart of the quest consisted of the 3 days and nights I spent alone and fasting in nature, seeking vision, healing, and transformation. Upon my return to base camp, for 3 days I was immersed in reincorporation activities guiding me to embody that which I learned on the vision quest. The following vignette was written during my 3-day solo fast.

*Arch Canyon. As I sit in a full 180° view of the canyon I see the image of an eagle, a loon, a snake, a turtle on the rock face wall straight across from me. In the canyon to the south I see a man and woman together. They are inseparable. But they transform into a howling wolf at different times of the day. On the surface, it seems that the interplay of the sun dancing on the canyon rock face projects these images, or perhaps it is something else? I keep wondering if someone else sitting beside me right now, in this moment, would be able to see these images too, or are these images projected out for me to see? Why are they seemingly reaching out to me from the layers of rock that fall deep into the canyon some 8,500 feet below? Or have I simply projected myself into these images? What message am I here to receive?*

There was a raw, authentic, unforgiving quality to learning in relationship with the elements that surrounded me. There was an organic unfolding to the process over which I had no control. Put another way, it developed gradually and naturally without being forced or contrived. This is when I learn best. I

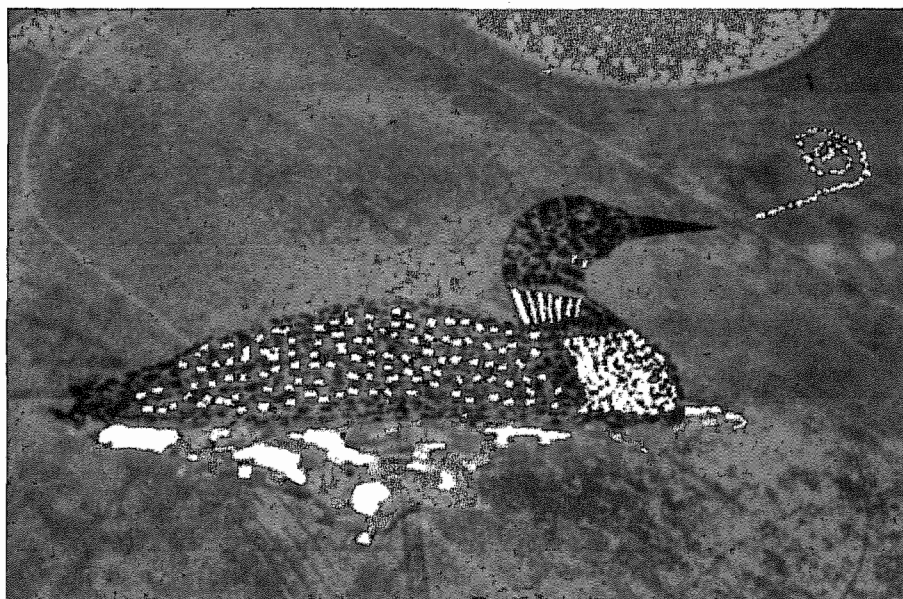
learn experientially, through story where I am able to go against more traditional academic structure of language and describe the fluid nature of my experience (Luce-Kapler, 2004) and I also learn best when immersed in the natural world, and not through the reduction of information to a statistical number turned into fact. During my 3-day solo fast on the edge of Arch Canyon, I had no idea what my vision represented, but suffice it to say it foreshadowed the staging of an event that brought a community of 750 students, teachers, administrators, custodial, and secretarial staff together in the creation of something unique.

### *Bringing Gifts Back to my People*

Back home during the reincorporation phase of my Vision Quest experience, I was directed to the work of Daniel Dancer, a conceptual artist from Oregon. Dancer's mission is to train our imaginations to awaken our sky sight, to rise above our problems and see the big picture and how each part fits into the whole. I arranged for Dancer to spend a weeklong residency at the elementary school where I was teaching. Over the course of the week, the conceptual artist taught all the students about collaboration, gratitude, sky sight, impermanence, and interconnection, through his deeply rooted commitment to our environment. At the end of his residency we created a loon as a school community. Each one of us became a human paint drop. From the ground it was hard to imagine what we were attempting to create as we huddled together on our hands and knees, but from the sky our image was clear. We became a loon on Lake Goodwill created from 900 square feet of blue jeans donated to us

from our local Goodwill Thrift Store as shown in Figure 1. Together, we became something greater than just ourselves as individuals; we came together in that moment and created something beautiful. Within minutes of the final photograph, in unison we called out, “Thank you Great Mystery! Thank you Great Mystery! Thank you Great Mystery!” In an instant all 750 of us got up off our knees and moved away from our positions. We were no longer human paint drops. Our loon creation disappeared. It may have disappeared from the ground, but it was, and still is, imprinted in my heart. I do not know how the other 749 people remember the loon experience, but I do know that in the moment of creation, my vision came off the rock face wall and into the hearts and minds of 750 people. It was a powerful moment in my life. This is an example of the tangible, yet intangible nature of who I am and how I learn. I learn in relationship to everything and everyone around me, like the tightly interwoven blend of various coloured threads that make up the textures and blends of various materials. Interconnectivity is what brings an organic resonance to everything I do.

The Loon~Sky~Lake collaborative experience allowed me to expand my teaching and learning practice outside the four walls of my classroom and reach out to a community of learners. It was the kind of learning experience I always envisioned as possible, but I just did not know how to carry out such a vision. There was no cookie-cutter exemplar for this type of learning experience for it was unique to anything I had ever encountered before, unique for the students and teachers involved, and unique to the school community as a whole. When I



*Figure 1.* A photograph of Loon~Sky~Lake; building community one student at a time.

got up from my knees and walked away from our creation, even though the tangible impermanence of it was realized, the loon experience was still very much apart of me. It became embodied. Bob Jickling (2009) described what he came to learn from his time in Nature while on one particular trip canoeing down Mountain River in northern Canada. What he gathered from that trip was that “we are wild places and they are us...what I have come to understand is deeply experiential, embodied, and beyond my ability to put it into words” (p. 167). I, too, have found it difficult to put into words what I experienced when creating Loon~Sky~Lake, even though I was not out tripping in northern Canada. By metaphorically walking through the gate, facing the unknown and immersing myself in something totally new and foreign to me, I came back transformed. The embodied experience of creating the loon with 750 people was a synthesis of all I had undergone during the vision quest and being able to bring what I had learned back to the people I work alongside in my day-to-day urban life was an extraordinary feeling, one I find difficult to put into words.

Building community one student at a time was our mission. Each person was expressed as a human paint drop in the creation of the loon, but without each individual paint drop working collaboratively together the entire vision would not have come to fruition. This is reminiscent of the transmission position to teaching and learning where knowledge is fixed and broken down into its component parts and where little or no room for reflection exists (J. P. Miller, 2007). The whole is not recognized, but only a solitary paint drop in a sea of black and white that is not able to take on a form on its own is visible.

“Discrete facts and the most basic skills” (Hart, 2009, p. 16) are emphasized at the “expense of knowledge, intelligence, understanding, and wisdom” (Hart, p. 17). In comparison, all of the human paint drops together are reminiscent of the transformational position to teaching learning which acknowledges inclusiveness and links to other forms of learning. The transformation position “does not discriminate against or diminish the individual in any way,” but rather creates learning moments that are “personally and socially meaningful to the student” (J. P. Miller, 2007, p. 12). This “creative activity [provided] a touchstone for the act of teaching/learning. Any activity is creative that involves freshness of thought or perception, offers provocation and opportunities to stretch our selves, or helps develop tools of the mind” (Hart, p. 160). Building community became a possibility by submitting ourselves to this creative transformational activity. Upon further reflection, Loon~Sky~Lake was in some ways a culminating performance task since this art-for-the-sky project was completed in my final month as an elementary school teacher.

#### *Masters Journey—the Council Process/Circle Meeting*

While evolving as a teacher/learner I underwent a research project that unbeknownst to me at the time was setting the stage for a learning experience such as Loon~Sky~Lake to take place. In early 2001, 3 years after the Ontario government implemented a standardized curriculum and province-wide testing, as a classroom teacher I sensed a heightened anxiety level from the students I taught. Students had uncompromising academic demands that were not present before, and this increased the student stress level. During this time I seriously

considered leaving the teaching profession due to the mounting stress of the standards movement, but instead I turned towards a process that would change the way I approached my teaching and learning practice.

I began searching for a way to reach the whole child, mind, body, and spirit, as cliché as that sounds. After reading Rachael Kessler's *The Soul of Education* (2000) I embarked on a quest to find out, "What nourishes the spirit of adolescents in the classroom?" (Brown, 2002). For my Master of Education action research project, I followed Kessler's work and engaged my class in 6 Council Process sessions where students openly discussed the questions and issues they pondered as adolescents. The first formal council came after I had the students anonymously write down their personal mysteries about themselves, others, and nature. I asked them to:

Please write about what you wonder about when you cannot sleep at night or when you're walking home alone. What do you worry about? Or feel curious about? Or feel afraid or excited about? What are your questions about yourselves, about others, about life itself? (Kessler, p. 11)

A colleague typed the questions so they remained completely anonymous. I read each question ceremoniously while we all sat in a circle. Upon completing the reading of the questions, the first council meeting was held. The questions the students generated drove the curriculum. Topics such as a sense of belonging, exclusion, family, peer-related issues, existential questions, and finally, what nourishes the spirit of the adolescent in the



classroom were discussed. My findings after six sessions and conducting a postsession interview indicated that for this particular group of 13- and 14-year-old students, the teacher played a meaningful role in every aspect of the nourishment of their spirit. My student participants suggested that at this point in my career I was able to create a safe and inviting environment for them.

Irene:

*I like the atmosphere of the session it was not uncomfortable and no rude comments about the questions of others. (Brown, 2002, p. 83)*

The participants also indicated that they enjoyed the curriculum I provided in the various subject areas that allowed them to choose activities that stimulated their creativity and imagination.

Irene:

*In school there is so much telling, why not experiencing?...the teacher must get in touch with themselves then not tell or give direction but show us the way and let us experience it for ourselves. (Brown, 2002, p. 107)*

The student participants also highlighted that I included an opportunity to experience an intrapersonal curriculum, specifically the council process (now referred to as a circle meeting), which provided space for them to look inside themselves.

Janice:

*I liked what we did today. As Mrs. Brown read the questions I looked around at everyone's faces and I could tell everyone was*

*thinking about the questions. I tried to answer each question about me. Then maybe I would know more about myself and who I really am, and what is important in my life.* (Brown, 2002, p. 85)

The council process provided time set aside specifically for the class community to meet. When we formed our circle, the students were given an opportunity to speak about issues that were important to them while at the same time engage in active listening while their fellow classmates spoke from their hearts.

Pete:

*The set-up of it with everybody in a circle, the candle, the speaking rock. In a circle it feels like you can open yourself up, and since it's a circle and it's closed nothing will get out.* (Brown, 2002, p. 117)

The circle, and the fact that the students' questions guided the discussion, shifted the power from the teacher to the students and provided them with the place and space to express their innermost thoughts (Kessler, 2000). Last, the students suggested that encouragement and competency increased their self-esteem.

For *Susan*, encouragement was sufficient to raise her self-esteem.

Susan:

*If someone is saying I'm doing a good job it makes me feel good.*  
(Brown, 2002, p. 112)

However, for *Pete*, a feeling of competency was required.

Pete:

*When I am in the classroom if I get good on a test or my report card is good, I get good grades then [my spirit] goes up because spirit goes along with self-esteem and if your self-esteem goes up your spirit will be high. (Brown, 2002, p. 113).*

It would seem that for this group of students, approaching my teaching and learning environment focused on students' needs at the center of my practice is what nourished their spirit in the classroom. Also, perhaps encouraging my students, delivering an intrapersonal curriculum, and fostering a safe classroom environment also allowed their spirit to be nourished. Or perhaps allowing my students to choose their own learning activities, which may have met their individual learning requirements, nourished their spirit. Or maybe it was a combination of all of the above. After reading my participants' journals and interview responses, I was genuinely surprised by how integral my role was in nourishing not only my students' spiritual, but social and emotional well-being too. My role exceeded the strictly academic side of teaching. Meaning, I took the initiative to find a curriculum, outside of our mandated curriculum, that addressed the child's whole being, mind, body, and spirit when I sensed this was missing.

Talking about spirit and education in the same breath often triggers polarized reactions. However, when I speak of holism together with the whole child, including his/her spirit in an educational setting, I am referring to his/her social and emotional needs specifically the depth dimension of human

experience (Kessler, 2000), the cultivation of one's intuition (Hart, 2009; J. P. Miller, 2007), transformational teaching and learning experiences (Hart; J. P. Miller), and ultimately teaching for wisdom (Hart). "Teaching for wisdom constantly asks who we are and who we are becoming. Wisdom seeks self-knowledge through the heart of understanding turned inward. This unfolding revelation is a movement toward an authentic life" (Hart, p. 119). One would be hard pressed to find mandated curriculum expectations with the words spirit, spirituality, depth dimension, intuition, transformation, wisdom, and authentic life as descriptors. Implementing a holistic curriculum that addressed the needs of the whole child was essential if sustained learning was to flourish. The results of my Master of Education research emphasized the importance that for teachers to be immersed in good pedagogy, not only academics should be emphasized, but also a young person's social, emotional, and spiritual well-being should be considered too.

After my action research was completed, I continued to conduct circle meetings over the next few years with each new grade 8 class. Each time, the same intensity of trust and sense of community were fostered amongst the groups. At present, my role as a teacher has shifted into adult education. Within the past 3 years I have taught Graduate, Undergraduate, and Bachelor of Education courses. Teaching adults was a new experience for me. I did not foresee using circle meetings as an instructional strategy and as an intrapersonal and interpersonal experience. However, it seemed natural to use this process

with each group. During all of the encounters my goal was for the participants to become more self-reflective.

*The Circle Meeting Ripples: Foundational Methods and Beginning Teachers*

While teaching the Foundational Methods course, I worked with young adults in their 20s and 30s as they learned the craft of teaching. Before their first teaching block in November, I carried out an experiential session where I led all my classes through the process of a circle meeting. By becoming active participants in a circle meeting, teacher candidates were exposed to a method that could potentially influence their own future teaching practice while at the same time assisted them as they navigated their new profession. For the most part teacher candidates were receptive to learning new ways to reach the spiritual, social, and emotional elementary students and were glad to engage in the process themselves. However, there have been teacher candidates who have found the process a waste of time. These are usually the teacher candidates who possess an essentialist teaching philosophy and value a transmission approach to teaching and learning. They believe that meeting the social, emotional, and spiritual needs of the students we teach is someone else's job not a teacher's job. However, I continue to infuse my practice with this strategy since I truly believe in its intrinsic worth.

When the beginning teachers returned from their first 4-week teaching block, I used a circle meeting as a teaching approach that would provide the space for each teacher candidate to share a story from their time in the field. Some stories were humorous; there were stories of frustration, stories of

disbelief, stories of moving out of one's comfort zone, stories of triumph; a few beginning teachers even shared their experience of attempting a circle meeting during their placements, and so much more. But on two occasions the stories brought the teller to a state of uncontrolled emotion. In both cases, the stories centered on elementary students they left behind. Both teacher candidates expressed a deep sadness as they described that ray of hope they bestowed on two needy students they vividly described to their fellow cohort members who quietly and attentively listened while sitting in the circle. In both stories, the two beginning teachers wondered aloud how their students would fare without the extra attention they felt they provided for their high needs students. Both of these young female teachers felt deep compassion and empathy for the students they had left behind. It was a moving experience. The circle allowed individuals to reflect on their experiences and share their insights. When I returned home from teaching that day I received an email from a student in one of my sections:

*P.S. I love circle meetings! They are great and I think that in addition to hearing everyone's experiences, it also makes you reflect upon your own experiences in light of what someone else might have gone through. I will definitely be using this in the future.* (Personal communication, December 4, 2006)

It seems that this young woman is beginning to appreciate the benefit of looking inward and reflecting on her own teaching experience as well as beginning to understand how useful this process could be for her future

students.

Since completing my Master's in 2002, I have initiated the circle meeting process with different groups, some for extended periods (10 months) and others for shorter periods (1 month) of time. Each experience was met with some success. I believe introducing circle meetings into my teaching practice on a regular basis after my Master's was completed not only transformed my practice, but that I, too, transformed as a human being. My outer and inner lives began to come into focus and harmonize. One of the aims of this self-study is to share an approach that will allow the reader to uncover his/her living contradictions (Whitehead, 1989). This approach will allow the reader to get inside the binary that may exist between his/her outer and inner lives and reflect on who s/he is within his/her teaching practice and who s/he is outside his/her teaching practice and seriously reflect on the consistency or lack of consistency between the two realms.

When given the opportunity to become a participant in a circle meeting, it seemed that embracing the social, emotional, and spiritual side of teaching and learning gave the beginning teachers a chance to look inside themselves and reflect on who they are and gave them a chance to explore the importance of their role as a teacher. I believe and maintain that the educational philosophy or belief system of a teacher will influence how s/he teaches. "Good teaching requires self-knowledge" (Palmer, 1998, p. 3). For example, asking beginning teachers to explore and interrogate what learning paradigm they align themselves with, whether it be behaviourism, cognitivism, constructivism, and

humanism, will perhaps allow them to become more aware of the pedagogical choices they make. For example, why they have chosen one teaching strategy over another or why they have chosen to use a particular assessment and evaluation tool. Without self-knowledge, teachers may not be able to connect with their students, and therefore they may not be able to provide the environment necessary to nourish the spirit or meet the individual needs of the students they teach. The teacher plays a central role in a student's learning experiences, and that was also the case in my adult classes.

In Chapter One, I located myself within my teaching and learning story and provided the necessary political, social, and cultural background information to ground my research. I think it is important to note that there have been many times throughout the research process where I seriously reconsidered completing a self-study. However, my current teaching and learning experiences, working with beginning and seasoned teachers, reaffirmed the need for me to share my story. In addition, the emergent nature of self-study continued to recycle its way into my practice and forced me to further explore my assumptions about teaching and learning. It has provided me with opportunities to improve my practice and examine my role as a change agent; it opened the door for me to share my knowledge both at the school level and at an academic level all the while giving me the chance to work with people who wanted to learn and who wanted to teach. It was an opportunity to perhaps make something good of my life. According to McAdams (1993), "the major psychosocial challenge facing all of us as modern adults is to make something



*good* of our lives in our own time, place, and ethos” (p. 6). A part of this dissertation is to unpack or unravel this “something good” and explore its meaning as reflected in my teaching life.

In Chapter Two, I connect the pieces of the theoretical framework: self-study, autoethnography, writing at the boundaries, and understanding the self that fasten the dissertation together. This will be followed by a discussion on the limitations of a self-study and criteria for assessing the work in a self-study. In the final section of Chapter Two, I discuss the method I employed throughout the Data Generation phase. Chapter Three holds the data generated in the collection of narratives. In Chapter Four, I use Probyn’s (1990) metaphor of locatedness to unpack the themes that emerged from the data and to ponder the question where is experience located? Chapter Five offers descriptions of practical learning moments using Drake’s (2007) Know/Do/Be framework which I grounded in pedagogical theories. This is followed by Chapter Six, where I introduce Third Space theory (Bhabha, 1994; Soja, 1996) as a space that allowed me to puzzle educational dilemmas, question the silences that exist, and also create the space for action and change to take place as I continue to reconcile the binaries that exist in my life both personally and professionally. In the final chapter, I revisit the questions that drove this self-study and outline the significance of this study.

## CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

*Greatness in teaching...requires a serious encounter with autobiography. Who are you? How did you come to take on your views and outlooks? What forces helped to shape you? What was it like for you to be ten? What have you made of yourself? Where are you heading? An encounter with these kinds of questions is critical to outstanding teaching because teachers, whatever else they teach, teach themselves. Of all the knowledge teachers need to draw on, self-knowledge is most important (and least attended to). (Ayers, 2001, p. 124)*

In this work I am attempting to understand the self in relation to my lived experiences so that I can use this knowledge to improve my teaching and learning practice. As an overall theoretical framework I used self-study as a method for critically examining the self. In the data generation phase I wrote a collection of stories in narrative form while simultaneously using other forms of inquiry such as writing as a method of inquiry, nomadic inquiry, and autoethnography. Emergent writing is the thread that weaves through the theoretical framework holding it together. All the pieces of this theoretical framework will be discussed in more detail.

### **Understanding the Self**

“A self-story is a narrative that creates and interprets a structure of experience as it is being told. Self-stories deal with the past, present and the future simultaneously” (Denzin, 2003, p. 38). This type of writing brings forth a “tripartite narrative voice” (Buss, 2002, p. 12) that functions as participant, witness, and reflective/reflexive consciousness. First, I am the participant in the story and the witness to that story through the retelling. Second, becoming the witness to my story allows me to deepen my self-understanding. Three,

through the use of hermeneutics, which “is the study and principles of interpretation aimed particularly at the discovery of hidden meanings in written text” (Rohmann, 1999, p. 174), a third reflective/reflexive voice emerges where I can begin to understand myself reflexively. According to Cole and Knowles (2000) being reflexive invites a person to “make connections between personal lives and professional careers, and to understand personal (including early) influences on professional practice.” (p. 2). They go onto explain that being reflexive is rooted in a critical perspective and that “such a critical perspective is characterized by interrogation of status quo norms and practices, especially with respect to issues of power and control” (Cole & Knowles, p. 2). In this third narrative voice, I can begin to peel back the layers and hopefully come to an even deeper understanding of how my lived experiences have informed who I am today. “Our capacity to turn around on the past and alter the present in its light, or to alter the past in light of the present” (Bruner, 1990, p. 109) is what gives me hope.

As Langeveld (1965) once said (cited in Van Manen, 1990), “to be able to *do* something you have to *be* something!” (p. 147). I *am* a teacher deepening her self-understanding by participating, becoming witness, and reflecting on my story in order to *be* fully prepared to make the most informed decisions on how to teach the children with whom I engage. The retelling of my story may illuminate some kind of interior truth for both the writer and the reader. I know that when I engage in the reading of narratives, I look for similarities and differences between the narrator and myself. I find myself

reflecting on the narrator's lived experiences and taking on those experiences as my own. What would I have done in that situation? Would I have taken a similar path; why or why not? The reading of a narrative for me is an internal dialogue where I am asking questions and replying to them in the context of the narrator's lived experiences but also in relation to my own epistemology.

Therefore, as Bruner (1990) suggests, "self is dialogue contingent" (p. 101).

The text often challenges me to think differently or confirms what I already believe. Consequently, the readers of my stories can interpret my collection of narratives and the subsequent hermeneutic interludes and decide for themselves if my story has impacted their story in any way. To accomplish this I use self-study as an overall theoretical framework as a method of examining the self.

### **Self-Study**

"Self-study is a method of examining the self, or the construction of the self; the self is typically the researcher's" (Strong-Wilson, 2006, p. 60).

Self-study methodologies have proven popular, especially for teacher research, perhaps due to the reflective nature of teaching and of teachers. Through critical self-reflection, the researcher calls into account his or her relationship to the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). It is during critical self-reflection that I question my own assumptions about my teaching and learning practice and also reflect on what Brookfield (1995) calls "considerations of power [which] undergird, frame, and distort educational processes and interactions" (p. 8).

Vicki LaBoskey (2004) outlined what she terms five essential characteristics for research in self-study:

1. self-initiated and self-focused;
2. aimed at improving teacher education
3. employing multiple (mainly qualitative) methods;
4. interactive at one or more stages of the process; and
5. achieving validation through the construction, testing, sharing and retesting of exemplars of teaching practice.

This self-study satisfies all five characteristics. First, this study is self-initiated and a self-focused study that stems from my Master's work using the council process and/or circle meetings as thoroughly discussed in Chapter One and ventures deeper into my teaching practice. Allowing stories from my lived experiences to emerge and then using rigorous, critical self-reflection to interpret their meaning satisfies the first characteristic of a self-study.

Second, one of the aims of the study is to develop a deeper understanding of my teaching practice and, with this knowledge, explore how I, as a teacher, can effect positive change, which is ultimately aimed at improving teacher education through the teaching of Foundational Methods.

Third, I am employing multiple qualitative methods: narrative, writing as a method of inquiry, and autoethnography, which will be fully explained in the Methods (Data Collection) section later in this chapter.

Four, the traditional intent of self-study makes the assumption that the researcher is interactive with one or more participants during the research process. As the sole participant, I deviate from the traditional intent of self-study by making the assumption about the reader and that is that s/he, too,

wants to reflect on who s/he is in relation to her/his teaching practice. This way the reader is an interactive participant, always questioning, searching, and deciding who s/he is as a teacher and who s/he wants to become as a teacher but without face-to-face engagement with me.

Last, by sharing the stories that are reflective of my lived experiences in and out of the classroom and interpreting them for this dissertation, the PhD process will serve as a source of validation. But most important, a certain methodological persistence and a relentless returning to the site of investigation, the collection of stories that emerge and my subsequent interpretation, characterize this self-study.

As I unpack my stories and hermeneutically reconstruct their meaning through an inward, outward, backward, forward approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I return to the site of the investigation to examine my beliefs, values, assumptions, and biases surrounding the teaching and learning process. My intent is to develop a deeper understanding of my teaching practice and with this knowledge explore how I can effect change and perhaps improve my practice; however, expanding the conversation to the reader and eventually writing about my experience in journal articles, presenting conference papers, and providing in-service sessions to teachers will allow me to reach an even larger audience.

### **Writing at the Boundaries**

When writing in search of personal meaning, writing at the boundaries (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) is the space where I can combine various forms

of inquiry that will allow for a thoughtful examination of my lived experiences. The boundary then becomes the invisible line that layers the various forms of inquiry I will be using. As I write my collection of stories I will be writing at the boundaries between narrative and “writing as a method of inquiry” (L. Richardson, 2000, p. 923), “nomadic inquiry” (L. Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 967), and autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Both writing as a method of inquiry and nomadic inquiry will be fully discussed in the Method (Data Generation) section of this chapter, but I will define the terms here.

Writing as a method of inquiry is when “writing *is* thinking, writing *is* analysis, writing *is* indeed a seduction and tangled method of discovery” (L. Richardson & St. Pierre, p. 967). Simply put, one writes to discover something s/he did not know before. Nomadic inquiry occurs while the researcher is engaged in writing as a method of inquiry. Nomadic inquiry comes about when one becomes acutely aware of all the little unforeseen things in his/her life that are going on in that moment s/he is writing. The sounds, the smells, the memories that pop in his/her head, they all seem “unrelated to her research project but are absolutely unleashed within it – she produces the strange and wonderful transitions from word to word, sentence to sentence, thought to unthought” (L. Richardson & St. Pierre, pp. 970-971). All three forms of writing, writing as a method of inquiry, nomadic writing, and autoethnography, which will be discussed next, are all examples of forms of writing that by virtue of their definition have unique characteristics but at the same time can be used simultaneously as one writes at the boundaries.

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), writing at the boundaries is the most important feature of narrative thinking. “When we write autobiographically – when we explore our own inner realms, dig deep into ourselves, and bring out what lies buried in our hearts – we write about the experiences and feelings that are most important to us” (Atkinson, 1995, p. 51). Teaching is a form of experience, one that is most important to me. When I reflect upon my life as a teacher, I find that writing at the boundaries “is the best way of representing and understanding [that] experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 18). By blurring the boundaries between the various forms of inquiry, it is my hope that I will be able to integrate my past with the present and look ahead and “anticipate, if not plan out” (Atkinson, p. 52) how to improve my teaching practice, come to a deeper understanding of self, and do my best to effect positive change within every level of an educational setting I find myself immersed in.

### **Autoethnography**

I chose to write my collection of narratives in an autoethnographic form for a number of reasons. Autoethnography blends ethnography and autobiography (Denzin, 1989). The autobiographical nature of this research method allowed me to pay attention to physical feelings, thoughts, and emotions that arise out of the lived experiences I have gone through as a teacher and as a learner (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Paying attention involves observing outward social and cultural aspects of personal experiences that are followed by inward features which expose a vulnerable self that is moved by, and may move



through, refract, and resist cultural interpretation. Autoethnography has all the essential elements needed for me to pay attention, and it is for this reason that this methodology was chosen.

In addition, autoethnography can be used as both a method and a text when reflecting on my life and how I have navigated my role as a teacher and an academic within my life (Reed-Danahay, 1997). By using self-narrative, I become an autobiographer who is placing her life story within the culture of teaching and within a wider social, political, and cultural context. Writing my story as an “insider” (Reed-Danahay, p. 3) allows for “multiple, shifting identities” (Reed-Danahay, p. 4) in my life to emerge. My roles as researcher, teacher, and learner move seamlessly in and out throughout the text as I write my story. Writing then becomes a method of inquiry “through which we can investigate how we construct the world, ourselves and others” (L. Richardson, 2000, p. 924). Through writing as a method of inquiry, a deeper understanding of my teaching practice may emerge, providing a space to continue improving my teaching practice. As educators, contends Judith Simmer-Brown (cited in hooks, 2003):

One of the best things that we can do for our students is to not force them into holding theories and solid concepts but rather to actually encourage the process, the inquiry involved, and the times of not knowing – with all of the uncertainties that go along with that. This is really what supports going deep. This is openness. (pp. 47-48)

I can apply this to my own teaching practice and this self-study. Making

meaning— with all its uncertainties—to live out and enact my experiences may pave the way for me to become the best teacher practitioner I can possibly become. As well, the openness to explore the self is what supports a deeper understanding of self. This, in turn, may assist me in arriving at a place where I feel whole. This is when I become aware of the adjustments that need to take place in my body, my spirit, and my mind, guiding me to integrate each area so I can continually work towards becoming self-actualized. Is this what Maslow (1968) was referring to when he discussed self-actualization as an enduring motivation? Since I am always striving to become self-actualized, will I always be striving to transform and go beyond my current form (Hart, 2009)?

Transformation is a movement toward increasing wholeness that simultaneously pushes toward diversity and uniqueness, becoming more uniquely who we are, and toward unity, recognizing how much we have in common with the universe and even recognition that we are the universe. In this way, self-actualization and self-transcendence do not contradict one another; instead they form part of the same process.

(Hart, pp. 157-158)

Perhaps it is the quest to reach this place of wholeness, that I feel I can live and work within an authentic space that mirrors how I envision my life to become. Autoethnography used as a method and a text is a viable interconnecting piece in the theoretical framework of this self-study research.

### **Limitations**

*It is possible I am pushing through solid rock  
in flint like layers, as the ore lies, alone;*

*I am such a long way in I see no way through,  
and no space: everything is close to my face,  
and everything close to my face is stone.*

*I don't have much knowledge yet in grief –  
so this massive darkness makes me feel small.  
You be the master: make yourself fierce, break in:  
And my great grief cry will happen to you.  
Rainer Marie Rilke (1981)*

### *The Other*

Self-study research makes it impossible to tell my stories and deconstruct meaning behind various artifacts without telling someone else's story, simply because life is usually lived in communion with others. Due to the fundamental dialectic involving self and other, my story is only a concrete realization of possible stories available in society. After all, writing is an act and, as in all acts, it comes with the responsibility for its effect on the other. I must assume that friends, colleagues, students, and family members will read what I have written (Ellis, 2004). In fact, stories are cocreated by the writer and the audience. Therefore, I have to consider my intention when writing my lived experiences and be aware of my motives and the effect they may have on the other.

My relationships and conversations with others are part of this life world, and there is a responsibility that comes with writing that is personal in nature. When I write about these encounters, I carry a responsibility that I do not take lightly. Denzin (2003) proposes that we should operate under the ethic of care, love, kindness, and the moral good and, like a medical doctor, we should seek to do no harm. One practice is to use pseudonyms (Gay &

Airasian, 2003) or create “composite characters” (Ellis, 2004, p. 152) for the people in my stories to maintain confidentiality except where consent is given. Throughout the writing of the collection of narratives and the vignettes scattered throughout the dissertation, I used pseudonyms when writing about the Other. The only time I used actual names was when I wrote about my two mothers, Jackie Matte and Mary Monette. Both women signed an informed consent form to give me permission to use their real names (see Appendix A).

Another practice is to “fictionalize details in a way that camouflages the actual event but still convey the meaning [I] want to get across” (Ellis, p. 152). For example, in one story I changed the gender of a “character” I was writing about to disguise that person’s identity. In another instance, I made the decision not to include a story since the episode I was describing would have required that I divulge personal information about the “character” in order for the essence of the story to be understood and I was not willing to do that. I am responsible for the people I write about and for the roles they have played in my lived experiences. The ethical concerns I have surrounding the other in my self-study will “shift and change” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 170) as my collection of narratives increases; however, by applying all of the strategies above, and operating under an ethic of care, I seek to do no harm.

### *Narrative Integrity*

Another practice I use is to continually ask myself as I write my stories: Does this story I have just told have narrative integrity (Freeman & Brockmeier,

2001)? I use the term integrity in place of reliability. According to Palmer (1998):

Integrity requires that I discern what is integral to my selfhood, what fits and what does not—and that I choose life-giving ways of relating to the forces that converge within me: Do I welcome them or fear them, embrace them or reject them, move with them or against them? By choosing integrity, I become more whole, but wholeness does not mean perfection. It means becoming more real by acknowledging the whole of who I am. (p. 13)

If I rely on being ethically self-conscious (Ellis, 2004) while I am in the midst of writing and focus on integrity, I may be able to use this as a sign of narrative integrity. For example, when I feel like I am posturing, lying, or hiding somehow within my writing, I need to pay keen attention to these feelings or, stated another way, I must become ethically self-conscious. I need to record that sensation in the moment as it occurs and use this as a gauge of narrative integrity. In doing so, my writing will perhaps allow me to face the “forces that converge within me” (Palmer, p. 13). By acknowledging the whole of who I am, I may find that what bubbles to the surface as I write my stories is not very flattering. This is all part and parcel of exploring the self. Being able to critically reflect on my own narrative field text will depend on understanding my weaknesses and sources of resistance to difficult or unexpected information. There may be the temptation to discard, ignore, rationalize, or prematurely intellectualize the information, and possibly diminish the insights it may

generate. Therefore, arriving at new understandings will require both the need for awareness of self and, paradoxically, the search for greater self-awareness.

When writing about the culture of classroom silence, Bosacki's (2005) paradoxical message was that "silence speaks" (p. 173). If I borrowed this message and applied it to my writing, I might become keenly aware of the silences that emerged from my writing. Between the words there may be a silence that speaks. This silence may occur for a number of reasons; it may be due to aesthetic, personal, and/or privacy issues, to name a few. My task is to investigate and explore the fine line between "truth," integrity, and common sense and thus become aware of those moments when the silence needs to be spoken.

### *Memory*

Writing for personal meaning provides the space to combine a thoughtful examination of subjectivity, memory, and images when recollecting and reconnecting with lived experiences. My "subjectivity unfolds within the pages" (Luce-Kapler, 2004, p. 82) as I write my collection of stories. Memory is the primary tool when reconstructing my lived experiences. It is an intersubjective act where the identity of the writer is formed from the recreation and reenactment of stories through memory. "Narratives [become] a way of remembering that also give shape to that process (Luce-Kapler, p. 82). According to Eisner (1998) "humans learn; they bring with them memories and interpretations of past events. What they experience is, in part, shaped by their

history” (p. 36). Both memory and interpretation are often argued as limitations of autobiographical writing (Randall, 1995).

I write about my own experiences without claiming that they are objectively true. “The telling or writing of an autobiographical narrative unfolds the life course as a retrospective reconstruction, that is, a recollection of the historical order of life events” (Brockmeier, 2001, p. 270). When I write about my own experiences, I write about them in the present. The merging of narrative and time are a kind of “retrospective teleology” (Brockmeier, p. 252). I am interested in what my ongoing experiences may be with regards to these past events and artifacts written in the present moment. I can never capture the experience, since “narrative is always a story about the past” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 750) but represent it as best I can by realizing that “every story is partial and situated” (Ellis & Bochner, p. 750). The accuracy that is relevant to these inquiries relates to my present-moment experiences of what I know of as my past, and every story has the anticipated future embedded into it. Whether or not the past actually happened the way I remember it or whether or not I experienced it in a particular way is not as important as what I want to understand and communicate in the present.

This allows me to look at my documented lived experiences in a different way. I am not concerned with the actions of other people as much as I care about what *I experienced*. I do not know if people actually did experience what *my* experience suggests they did. Therefore, this transforms the “real people” into fictional or composite characters based on real people. This

hopefully makes clear to the actual people in my writings and other audience members that I do not presume and do not intend to imply that my experiences are true for anyone other than me, and only for a given me, in a given moment. In this way, I am not trying to represent the truth; I am trying to represent the essence of my experience in a way that could be true. My reality is not another person's reality. Who I am, my gender, my life experiences, my history, my personality are part of the elements that construct my reality. This applies to each individual. By representing the essence of my experience a space is created for a different story, allowing perhaps the emergence of a transformational story.

#### *Other Kinds of Knowledge*

At this moment, my research is my life, my life is relationships, my relationships are my research, my life is writing, and I am writing my life. I am working in a liminal space, not sure of where my inquiry will lead, but I also see this as a place of unraveling, unpacking, and possibility. When I write there is a tension between the writing and coherence. I am often left in a position where what I long "to describe seems always just before [me]" (Luce-Kapler, 2004, p. 87). The writing lacks an "encompassing wholeness" (Luce-Kapler, p. 88), but it is this inability to capture the whole that invites an "'element of indeterminacy' that initiates a performance of meaning rather than formulating meaning itself" (Luce-Kapler, p. 88). Through the self-study process I am not seeking to generalize knowledge, but I am seeking other kinds of knowledge—embodied, local, resonant, heuristic, insightful, aesthetic, and so forth that will



provide a performance of meaning. I am the only one providing data; therefore, I am the narrator, witness, and the interpreter of my stories. I will be writing from a place of vulnerability, by acknowledging the silences. I will be revealing myself in a way I have not experienced before. Writing then “becomes a site of possibility” (Luce-Kapler, p. 88). According to L. Richardson (2000), “there is no such thing as ‘getting it right’, only getting it differently contoured and nuanced” (pp. 930-931). All of the above possibilities could be viewed as limitations of this study.

### **Criteria for Assessing the Work**

When considering self-study research one must question the trustworthiness of such a research design under the terms credibility, transferability, and validity (Creswell, 1998). Depending on how the reader views credibility, self-study research may or may not be considered credible. However, in postmodern qualitative research such as autoethnography and narrative inquiry, there is no one truth. Credibility in this sense means that my stories “seek verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience just described is lifelike, believable, and possible” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 751). Going one step further then, if the reader thinks *with* story (Frank, 2002) instead of thinking *about* story, and takes on the story’s message seriously by making a pact with him/herself to live differently (King, 2003), then this may offer another form of credibility.

Transferability is the ability to convey a message from one person, place, or situation to another. Within this self-study the reader may or may not

reach a conclusion that is transferable. The best writings are the ones that resonate with the reader—the story being told runs close to the reader’s story. If the reader sees him/herself in the writer’s words, images, experiences—then the reader may begin to come to a better understanding of self through the other. “A story’s transferability is constantly being tested by readers as they determine if it speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know. Likewise, does it tell them about unfamiliar people or lives?” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 751). This may provide the reader with the impetus to live his/her life differently or not (King, 2003).

In traditional research, to validate findings a researcher draws on multiple data gathering techniques in order to triangulate his/her findings. From this triangulation a researcher can “draw meaningful and justifiable inferences from scores about a sample or population” (Creswell, 2002, p. 183). In qualitative research the notion that there is no single truth makes validity a challenge. L. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) use the image of a crystal to offer a different image of what constitutes validity in a postmodern text. A crystal:

combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multi-dimensionalities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change, and are altered, but they are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colours, patterns, and arrays

casting off in different directions. What we see depends on our angle of repose – not triangulation but rather crystallization. (p. 963)

Crystallization, then, provides an alternate image for validating research findings. A vision of the endless possibilities that may emerge out of postmodern research is evident in the complex structure of the crystal. Our understanding is deepened and yet partial. We know more, and yet we doubt more, but ultimately we know there is always more to know (L. Richardson & St. Pierre). Perhaps the reader will share in this notion of crystallization and allow this self-study to elicit more questions than answers.

In addition to the reader's criteria for assessing this work through credibility, transferability, and crystallization, I need a framework to give proper consideration to what I have written. As a researcher immersed in a self-study with my own beliefs and criteria, I require a frame to allow me to critically reflect on the "interpretive sufficiency, representational adequacy, and authentic adequacy" (Denzin, 2003, p. 121) of my writing. Laurel Richardson presents four criteria to assess creative analytical processes in her collaborative chapter in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (L. Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). I decided to adopt the four criteria as a frame to allow me to critically reflect upon my writing and to deepen my engagement in the self-study process. These include:

1. *Substantive contribution.* Does this piece contribute to our understanding of social life? Does the writer demonstrate a deeply grounded (if embedded) social scientific perspective? Does this piece

seem “true” – a credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the “real”?

2. *Aesthetic Merit*. Rather than reducing standards, another standard is added. Does this piece succeed aesthetically? Does the use of creative analytical practices open up the text and invite interpretive responses? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex and not boring?

3. *Reflexivity*. How has the author’s subjectivity been both a producer and product of this text? Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of view? Does the author hold himself or herself accountable to the standards of knowing and telling of the people he or she has studied?

4. *Impact*. Does this piece affect me emotionally or intellectually? Does it generate new questions or move me to write? Does it move me to try new research practices or move me to action? (p. 964)

Throughout the data collection phase: writing the narratives, and their subsequent hermeneutic interlude, I will be returning to this set of interpretive criteria that emphasize the aesthetic qualities of my work as well as its substantive contributions to this body of knowledge and asking myself these questions in order to deepen my engagement with the writing process. I will not be formally using these headings during the interpretive phase of the hermeneutic interlude, but rather using the four criteria: substantive contribution, aesthetic merit, reflexivity, and impact as a guide to loop back on

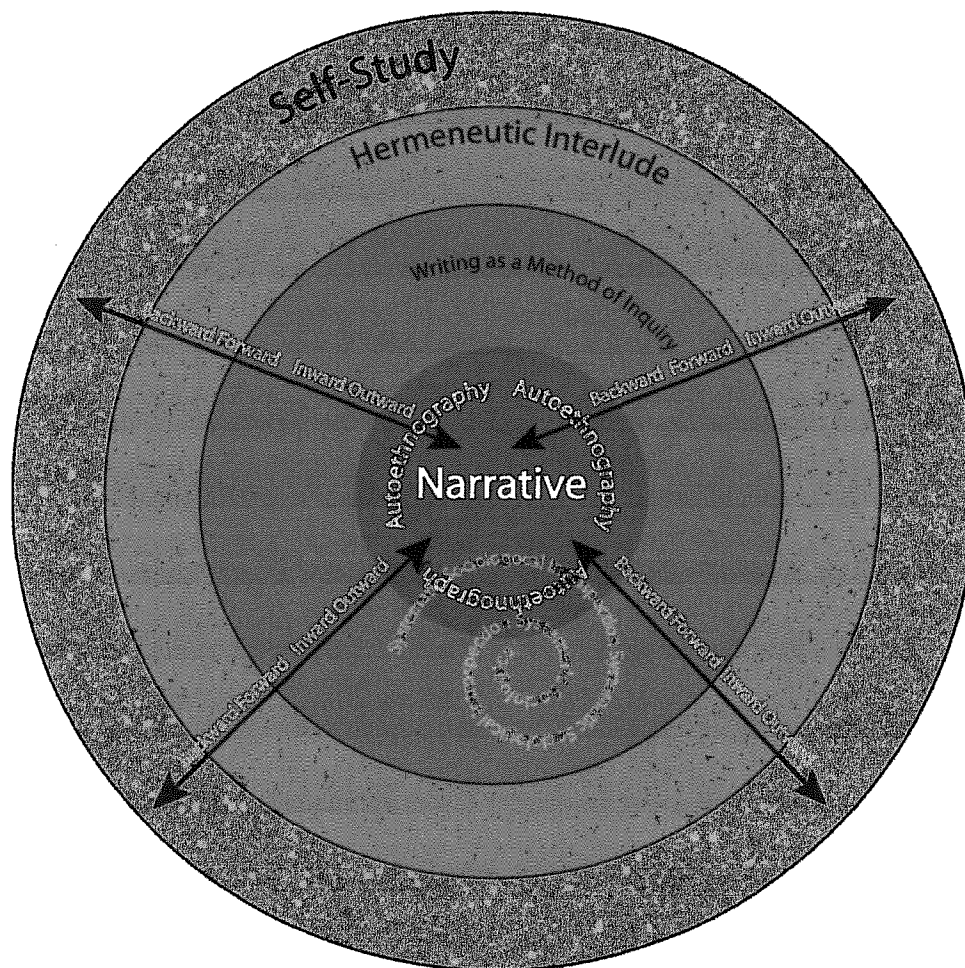
my writing and critically reflect on whether my narratives captured the essence of their intent. The four criteria will also be helpful for the reader when assessing my writing.

### **Method (Data Generation)**

The methodological process used in this self-study involves a four-step process. However, embedded within the four steps is an emergent, heuristic, and hermeneutic engagement, which is described below. The basic progression involves the following four steps:

- Step One: Compose and write an autoethnographic event.
- Step Two: Use systematic sociological introspection during the writing phase.
- Step Three: Use the four directions of inquiry, backward, forward, inward, outward, during the writing phase and the subsequent phase, the hermeneutic interlude.
- Step Four: In the hermeneutic interlude, interpret the narrative using the four directions of inquiry.

However, within this four-step linear progression there are a number of engagements throughout the process that loop back on themselves. In order to clarify this process, I created a visual representation of circles and spirals which is illustrated in Figure 2. For example, in step two during the systematic sociological introspection, I may need to revisit the autoethnographic event composed in step one to perhaps bring forth more emotional impact through the interjection of dialogue, or a more detailed setting description, or a more in-



*Figure 2. Visual representation of the methodological process*

depth written account of the event. Therefore, I need to move from step two back to step one before either moving on to step two or to step three. Being flexible and providing a space where an emergent, heuristic process can occur is necessary. In the following section, I briefly describe each concept involved at each step. However, in the subsequent subsections, I provide a more detailed explanation of each concept.

In step one, I use writing as a method of inquiry (L. Richardson, 2000) to compose a collection of autoethnographic narratives. Each event I have written about has had some impact on my teaching and learning practice. In step two, while I am engaged in the writing of the narrative pieces, I will bring forth the emotional impact of the narratives using Ellis's (2004) systematic sociological introspection, which will be explained later in the following section. During step three, I use Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) four directions of inquiry to do research into an experience—by focusing on the inward (internal) and outward (existential), and backward and forward (temporal) spaces as I write the narrative. When the autoethnographic piece has been fully completed, only then do I move to step four, the hermeneutic interlude. This is where I attempt to interpret the autoethnographic narrative and come to some understanding of how that event played out in my life as a teacher. Even though I have simplified the method into four steps, the reader should be aware that within those four steps there are a number of processes that naturally loop back on each other, thus making this an emergent and heuristic process.

The design of this dissertation has been shaped by ongoing critical reflection (Brookfield, 1995) both with my own process as a teacher and as an academic. As mentioned earlier, as I critically reflect I question my assumptions about my teaching and learning practice and also reflect on how power undergirds, frames, and at times distorts educational processes. The interwoven inquiry between the narrative and the hermeneutic interlude means that they are in constant dialogue. In that sense, the process of moving backward and forward between the two distinct yet connected sequences in my method examining and deconstructing its content is also part of my methodology.

The theory and practice of my research are linked and mutually dependent. My roles as a teacher and as an academic are linked and mutually dependent. For example, on the surface the opening vignette of Chapter One, King's College Circle, describes my first criterion bike race. However, if I explore the text hermeneutically and I reach inside that experience and introduce myself to the possible meanings that this particular experience unveils, then I open myself up to who I was and how this particular lived experience may inform who I am today in my role as a teacher, professor, and academic.

An exploration of the opening vignette would take into consideration the following possibilities: accepting challenges, naïveté, capitalizing on an opportunity, risk taker, stubborn, doesn't always listen to authority, strategist, alert, and can be pushed around, to name just a few. Each quality is then



discussed more fully during the writing of the hermeneutic interlude. I dig deeper into each one of the possibilities using the four directions: forward, backward, outward, and inward and attempt to show how each of these possibilities has revealed itself in my role as a teacher, professor, and academic. By bringing my practical experience, understanding, and knowledge of teaching into the academic domain, this self-study research project may have the propensity to offer both teachers and researchers alike new ways to observe, recognize, and understand how they can bring forth change in their own practice in the educational arena.

*Writing as a Method of Inquiry*

With the postmodern turn, the doubt that any method or theory has a universal claim as the “right” or privileged form of knowledge is present (L. Richardson, 2001). In this self-study I do not gather “data” as little bits of information as the building blocks of knowledge, but rather seek to come to some understanding with the story that unfolds in my life. For me the story is larger, broader, and deeper than any given conversation, experience, or moment. It is about the relationships between beings, the web of life, and a single moment, though sometimes captivating, it is only part of the larger story.

According to L. Richardson (2001) what postmodernism does is to recognize the situational limitations of the knower. It recognizes that “[I] have partial, local, temporal knowledge – and that is enough” (p. 35). One method to get at my story is to simply write as a method of inquiry (L. Richardson, 2000). This is a way of finding out about myself and my world (L. Richardson, 2001).

I write to inquire into who I am as a method and a text. According to Rose cited in L. Richardson (2001), “when we view writing as a method, we experience ‘language-in-use’ and how we ‘word the world’ into existence” (p. 35). Through the “worded world” I strive to word and reword my experiences, “never accurately, precisely, completely captur[ing] the studied world, yet [I] persist in trying. Writing, as a method of inquiry, honours and encourages the trying” (L. Richardson, 2001, p. 35). Like L. Richardson (2001), “I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I did not know before I wrote it” (p. 35). Writing is a process of discovery, a journey towards new understanding. I am writing a collection of stories that reflect events in my life that have influenced me and perhaps given me the confidence to pursue nontraditional approaches to teaching and learning within my teaching practice. I am perceived as someone who does not always follow conventional teaching practices. I am someone who questions dominant practices and provides possible alternatives where applicable. Not all conventional practices are substandard in fact many are outstanding. But I have become a teacher/learner who provides alternatives for teachers who are interested in exploring a variety of innovative teaching strategies.

At the outset of my research I did not know for sure which stories would come forth. Of course I had an inkling of some stories that might surface, but not all. I allowed each story to emerge in a fluid, natural way; after all, writing as a method of inquiry is a writing process that draws upon the hope that I would find out something I did not know before. However, when stories I

expected to emerge came forth, I paid particular attention to these stories and wrote, “to disrupt the known and the real” (L. Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 967). I accomplished this through the hermeneutic interlude, which will be fully explained later in this chapter. A hermeneutic interlude will appear after each of the individual stories, where I “attempt[ed] to determine the meaning embodied” in the story (Van Manen, 1990, p. 38). The hermeneutic interlude provided the space for me to focus on the four directions of any inquiry: inward and outward, backward and forward (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) while I disrupted the known and the real while coming to some understanding of that lived experience. However, under the rubric of philosophical hermeneutics, as discussed in the Theoretical Framework chapter, “understanding is an event or process that one participates in versus a process that is constructed by the knower (subject) to make sense of (discover meaning of) an object (text)” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 193).

In this self-study, understanding a text and interpreting it are essentially the same undertaking. Understanding is always open and anticipatory; one never achieves a final, complete interpretation. This is an example of “nomadic inquiry” (L. Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 967). Interpretation is not the “discovery of meaning in the world but rather the ‘introduction of meaning’” (L. Richardson & St. Pierre, p. 968). Taking my cue from St. Pierre, it is not that I reject meaning but rather that I am shifting the focus from What does this or that mean? to questions such as How do meanings change? How have some themes emerged and others been eclipsed or simply disappeared? What do

these processes reveal about my teaching practice? In this way “the postmodern critique of interpretivism opens up the concept of writing and enables us to use it as a *method of inquiry*, a condition of possibility for ‘producing different knowledge and producing knowledge differently’” (St. Pierre, 1997 cited in L. Richardson & St. Pierre, p. 969). The narratives and the hermeneutic interlude are meant to be complementary and mutually reinforcing parts of the method, and my goal is that the relationship between the two parts will contribute to the originality and creativity of the whole. The hermeneutic interlude places writing as a method of inquiry as part of the larger field of autoethnographic writing, within a historical, social, intellectual, and cultural context.

### *Hermeneutic Interlude*

Hermeneutics is rooted in philosophy. It is a reflective discipline. According to Gadamer (1975) in his seminal work *Truth and Method*, a hermeneutic undertaking is “a rediscovery of something that was not absolutely unknown but whose meaning had become alien and inaccessible” (p. 176). Gadamer assumed this position since it troubled “truth” methods of human sciences that were modeled after rigorous behavioural science methods that required rational understanding, and more traditional “methods” which suggested that correctly interpreting a text meant recovering the original intention of the author who wrote it. Gadamer’s notion of understanding is in the interpretation of a text which involves a “fusion of horizons” (p. 305) with the researchers own lived experiences, or as he describes, “historically effected

consciousness” (p. 336). The two cannot be separated. A person’s history or background fuses with an experience to form some understanding and this understanding will be unique to the person interpreting the experience. As Gadamer explains:

Every actualization in understanding can be regarded as a historical potential of what is understood. It is part of historical finitude of our being that we are aware that others after us will understand in a different way. And yet it is equally indubitable that it remains the same work whose fullness of meaning is realized in the changing process of understanding, just as it is the same history whose meaning is constantly in the process of being defined. (p. 366)

With this in mind, at the heart of hermeneutics is the belief that “a text (or a phenomenon) must be understood within its proper context; in this way, its actual meaning and the intention of its author can truly be understood” (Rohmann, 1999, p. 174). By searching for personal meaning within the context of my lived experiences in and out of the classroom, I access my experiences through an act of discovery or unveiling. The use of narrative writing, understanding stories, and artifacts within their living context, while at the same time appreciating the social, historical, and psychological context, will allow the hermeneutical method of understanding to unfold. The hermeneutical task becomes of itself the questioning of things (Heidegger, 1962).

Within Chapter Three, data generation, I am naming the section that comes after each narrative a hermeneutic interlude. Bob Kull (2005) completed

a self-study in deep wilderness solitude for his PhD dissertation and included essays housed between 400 pages of journal entries. He numbered each essay and called them interludes. The interlude essays “frame the journal writings and provide context, are more analytical than the journal, but still informal. They are not written as abstract discussions, but are intended to explore and describe various themes directly relevant to my lived experience” (Kull, p. 8). The hermeneutic interlude will also explore and describe emergent themes as well as give the reader time to question what I have written. The self-study process is “a complicated hermeneutical enterprise in which [I am] continually reconstructing [my] world and [my]self though the routine reinterpretation of [my] experience” (Randall, 1995, p. 6). Therefore, philosophical hermeneutics, also called ontological hermeneutics, is not a method per se but rather it assumes that understanding an object and interpreting it are essentially the same undertaking. Following Heidegger's (1962) lead, Gadamer (1975) argues:

Hermeneutics is ontological, universal and conversational because the interpretation of an object is always a dialogical encounter – as interpreters we participate in, open ourselves to, share in, and listen to claims that the object is making on us. Understanding is always open and anticipatory; one never achieves a final, complete interpretation.  
(cited in Schwandt, 2001, p. 193)

Thus, when using this framework it is important to note that the understanding I arrive at will not be complete, but it will be in a state of becoming, one that will continue to be interpreted and worked upon as my

practice either improves, worsens and/or changes. In other words, “we begin to understand that our story is always in process, as are we, of expanding and changing” (Atkinson, 1995, p. 52). The narratives and the accompanying hermeneutic interludes do not chase after answers; they consider and uncover possibilities. However, this should not interfere with educators who read this dissertation; it may bring to the fore the notion that they too are in a state of becoming involved in a process that allows them to expand and change their story and their future.

### *Systematic Sociological Introspection*

As I write of my collection of narratives, I embrace Ellis’s (2004) systematic sociological introspection in order to bring forth the language of pathos (the bracing power of emotional life). As Ellis explains:

I conjure up emotional, visual, and other sensory images about my experiences of real people engaged in actual events. Then I delve into my memory, putting myself back in the scene that took place, letting the events replay in my mind and emotions...then I search for words to describe the feelings running through me. I use imagination to select scenes and characteristics to develop, keeping in mind the press to tell a coherent story that makes sense to an imagined audience. (p. 333)

By paying attention to my “physical feelings, thoughts, and emotions” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 737), I write a story and throughout the process try to understand the experience I lived, which may invoke a larger sense of what it means to know—a knowing-in-praxis, a knowing gained and regained. I apply

Ellis's method by recalling past experiences by connecting my memory to people and past events, as I illustrated in the King's College Circle vignette. I situate myself in a place from my past, and with the use of my imagination I use my senses to recreate the physical feelings, thoughts, and emotions I remember experiencing at the time. After this important preparation phase, I write the narrative and bring forth the pathos and mythos (the invigorating power of the archetypal energies of story) in order to reexperience and then reexamine each event and bring new meaning to each one by virtue of my present reality. Each independent story makes up the whole and forms a rich history through the progression of my lived experiences.

*Four Directions of Any Inquiry (and Place)*

Another approach "to do research into an experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50) is to use the four directions of inquiry: inward and outward, backward and forward. Simultaneously, I venture internally and existentially while always acknowledging the temporality of my inquiry. When I go inward, the internal conditions such as "feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions" (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 50) are at play. By venturing outward I move toward existential conditions, as in the environment, and also make connections to the literature. By backward and forward, the temporality of the past, present, and future are realized. And last, a third aspect is place, "which attends to the specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of inquiry landscapes" (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 51). When I write



my narratives and the accompanying hermeneutic interlude, I will be utilizing the four directions of inquiry.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout the chapter, theories were highlighted that interconnect, overlap, and merge to create a theoretical framework that supports my thesis topic—to develop a deeper understanding of my teaching and learning practice and, with this knowledge, explore how I, as a teacher and learner, can effect positive change which is ultimately aimed at improving teacher education. It is also my hope that you, as the reader will be engaged, in the same process exploring how you can transform your practice in whatever field you are engaged in. With the belief that I interpret where I am now in my teaching career in terms of where I have come from and where I am going, I have described a method that will allow me to reconstruct my lived experiences in light of the present with the hope that a transformational experience will effect positive change in the future.

By utilizing the tenets of a self-study (LaBoskey, 2004) as the backdrop, I highlighted how autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and writing as a method of inquiry (L. Richardson, 2000) interconnect, overlap, and merge, supporting my inquiry. In addition, I described some of the limitations of undertaking a self-study, drawing attention to how the role of “the other” must be negotiated, how I will strive for narrative integrity, the role that memory plays in remembering, and how other kinds of knowledge will be

sought. The chapter also stressed the importance of scaffolding criteria for assessing the work throughout the writing process.

The chapter ended with a description of the four-step method (data collection) that underscored the use of a systematic sociological introspection (Ellis, 2004) and the four directions of inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) during the writing phase. Finally, the hermeneutic interlude was presented. It will frame the narrative writing and provide a detailed interpretation of the stories through one of the theoretical lenses described throughout the chapter.

Chapter Three, invites the reader to engage in my lived experiences through a reading of my collection of narrative stories (data generation). Each story will have an accompanying hermeneutic interlude, which will deconstruct the story's impact as reflected in my present teaching practice.

### CHAPaTER THREE: DATA GENERATION

*No child on earth was ever meant to be ordinary, and you can see it in them, and they know it too, but then the times get to them, and they wear out their brains learning what folks expect, and lend their strength trying to rise over those same folks.*

(Dillard cited in Payley, 1999, p. 82)

#### Narrative 1–Anticipation

Finally, it's Friday evening. With eager anticipation I look out the window, keeping an eye out for the '65 blue Cheverolet to turn onto our street. I have been waiting since Monday for Mary to return home. Transparent cream colour drapes cover the window but I am still able see the corner of Lakeshore Road and Westminster Drive. I pull back the sheers in order to get a front-row view of the afternoon showers. The rain is drizzling down the windowpane, creating pocket pools of water on the ledge below. The light from the sun is trying to make its way through the clouds, but instead it is casting a shadowy light on the glass. When I keep a steady gaze in one area I can see a cat, a turtle, and a lizard from the pattern the water droplets form as they shimmer down glass. The cat and the turtle disappear much too soon after they are discovered, but I manage to hold on to the outline of the lizard for a moment longer. Out of the corner of my eye a shot of blue emerges onto Westminster Drive. "She's home!" I cry out to no one in particular as I spring off the olive green sofa and run to the front door. I can barely reach the handle, but somehow I manage to turn the knob and with all my strength push open the door. By this time, Mary has turned into the driveway with her wiper blades still flip-flopping against the windshield. Her brown curly hair shines through

with each pass of the blades. All at once the pulsing comes to a halt. The headlights on the General Motors car go out, and Mary appears from the driver's side of the car. I open the screen door and without a thought run out to greet her. My socks immediately start to soak up puddles of water. She pulls me up into her arms and gives me a big hug. "How was your week?" she asked.

"Fine!" I replied.

"Guess what's in the bag?" she asks teasingly.

"I dunno?" I said with a devilish grin.

"Why don't we wait until we get inside out of the rain?"

Mary always brought us something back from her weekly home visits. What would it be this time? She opens the back door of the Chev and starts to unload the baggage sitting on the back seat. First she pulls out her tan suitcase. I immediately grab it from her. It is almost as tall as I am. I turn and start moving towards the house, lifting up the suitcase with both my hands, leaning it against my leg, taking a step, and putting it down. Lifting it up, leaning it against my leg, taking a step, and putting it down. Mary grabs the bright blue teacher bag from the back seat and hauls her beige vinyl purse over her right shoulder. She kicks the back door shut with her foot and makes her way up the walkway. When she catches up to me she exchanges the small suitcase for the teacher bag. I was then able to walk more rhythmically, even though I still had to lean the teacher bag against my leg each step of the way. I look up at her and ask, "Isn't there anything you want from the trunk?"

“Not right now. Let’s get you inside; your socks are getting soaked out here,” she prompts.

Mary’s job requires her to be gone for days at a time while she works with preschool children and their parents in their homes. She works with families right across Southwestern Ontario. All the children she teaches have some degree of hearing loss from mild hearing impairment to complete hearing loss, with many of her students having multiple disabilities. As a home visiting teacher she is their link to the various agencies they will need to connect with as their child gets older. She becomes a counsellor to these families, helping them deal with their child’s disability all the while teaching them how to communicate with their own child.

Once inside I drop Mary’s teacher bag in the front hall and remove my soaked socks. “I’ll go get Mom,” I state excitedly. Mary brings in her suitcase and slips off her shoes. She carefully places the mystery bag in the front hall closet. Her brown curly hair was even curlier since the rain got a hold of it. She shakes the excess water from her hair, dries her glasses and makes her way into the kitchen.

Mom had started a spaghetti and meatball dinner for two of the three of us: Rosalind and me. Walter will have hamburgers since he doesn’t like spaghetti and meatballs. I like how my Mom doesn’t force us to eat what we don’t like. How can Walter not like spaghetti and meatballs? My brother, sister, and I are very different. My sister Ros is 5 years older and is a voracious reader. She reads in bed all day long. I couldn’t do that. I need to be moving

around. My brother, Walter, is 4 years older and likes to take things apart and then put them back together. I play Lego with him when he lets me. I, on the other hand, like to be active all the time. Mom even tells the story that I never walked as a baby but rather ran right from the get-go. My brother, sister, and I are as different as the foods we enjoy. Later in the evening, long after we finish eating and cleaning up, Mom and Mary are having a special dinner for just the two of them: duck à l'orange with wild rice. Not the kind of food I would want to eat. I appreciate the fact that I am allowed to eat what I like.

As I sit in the kitchen with Mom and Mary, listening to the stories from the families Mary worked with during the week, I wonder how she teaches communication skills to individuals who can't hear. I find it all so fascinating. At the same time I am becoming increasingly impatient, dying to know what is in the mystery bag she teased me with on her way inside.

"Are you forgetting something?" I finally asked as I squirmed in my seat.

"Ahhh the bag" Mary replied, "Go get it. It's in the front hall closet."

"I know!" I said, "I peeked around the corner and watched you put it there."

"Did you now?" Mary said as if she didn't know. Off I went like a shot to fetch the bag.

"Here it is," I said as I held out my hand holding the brown paper bag.

"Close your eyes and pick something out," Mary insisted. In went my hand. I rummaged around feeling my way through the various items. A tall

cylindrically shaped object was what I chose. I grabbed onto it and yanked it out of the bag.

“Bubbles!” I exclaimed, “Thanks Mary!” And off I went to play with my new toy.

### *Morning Ritual*

I got up very early this morning, as I do every morning. It is my favourite time of the day. It is quiet and peaceful since everyone else is fast asleep enjoying their Saturday morning sleep-in. I am quietly playing in my room with the many stuffed animals I have at my disposal. Museau, Big Bear, Alfonso, and the rest of the cast are all playmates on my boat. I have them all up on my bed (23 in total). Together we are sailing down the river towards the ocean. Big Bear is at the helm guiding us. Alfonso is his first mate and stands next to Big Bear. I have a spyglass, and I am on the lookout for pirate ships. Never too far from me is Museau, since he is the smallest and the oldest of all my furry friends. I am told that I have had Museau since the day I was born. I even have a photograph from when I was a newborn baby smiling away in my crib with Museau right by my side. For hours each morning I create an imaginative world all my own until a whiff of toast with peanut butter lures me down to the kitchen.

Now that Mary has had a good night's sleep I wonder if I should ask her if she is going to bring anything in from her car, especially from the trunk stuffed full of toys? I wonder what toys she taught with this past week? I knew the possibilities. There could be that wind-up robot I love so much, the one that

shows all its inner workings. Maybe she has her set of stacking toys, nesting toys, and/or shape sorters this week. I always enjoy the jack-in-the box or puzzles to be put together. I wonder if she used the interactive toys or the dolls and doll clothes. Maybe she had those colourful plastic fruits and vegetables, or maybe, just maybe, she had Candyland with her. I am always delighted when she brings in that one special toy for me to play with on the weekend.

### *Toys*

Toys are an integral part of teaching children from birth to 5 years of age. Each toy has a role to meet the various learning needs of each child. They are used for cognitive development, language development and skills, numeracy, imaginative play, concept development, interactive activities for socialization, and so much more. Mary is an expert at knowing what toy to use for each purpose. I remember the time I got to go with Mary and visit the school where she worked. She was returning the toys she had used and selecting new ones for her next week's lessons. There was a long, winding driveway up to the school with a big clock tower at the end to greet us. Her office area was in a round portable painted the colour blue. When we walked into the round room there were six desks one for each preschool teacher, and surrounding them were shelves filled with every toy imaginable. I was so excited to see so many toys in one space. I knew that each toy was special and that it was through the use of these toys during "play" that Mary taught her students how to communicate. But for me, at 4 years of age, a room full of toys was magical. It offered me the



chance to play with a new toy each week. Little did I know that I was learning too.

By Saturday afternoon the sun was shining. Mary finishes her Saturday errands grocery shopping and a trip to the Hudson's Bay to buy Walter a new pair of pants. When she returns she allows me to go out to her car and choose a toy from the trunk of her blue Chevrolet. I know exactly what I am looking for. I select the transparent robot with the exposed inner workings. I love to see the cogs circulate and make the other cogs move. During my Saturday afternoon playtime I pass my time blowing bubbles and manipulating the robot to blow bubbles with me. We take turns to see who can blow the biggest bubble. When Mary enters the living room she sits down on the carpeted floor beside me. "You want to try this?" she asks.

"Sure," I reply. I put down the robot and place the lid back on the bubble container. She opens a box with different shaped holes on top and dumps the colourful plastic pieces on the floor.

"Let's see if we can put these shapes in some kind of groupings."

"Okay." Mary hands me the shapes one at a time and I start to work through the sorting process. I take two shapes from her hands and place them together on the rug. I put two more in one pile close to the other pile but far enough to show they are different and the final two beside each other.

"What makes the three piles special?" she asks.

"Colour! These two are blue, these two are yellow, and these two are red," I replied.

“Very good!” Mary said encouragingly, “now let’s see if we can put these shapes in some kind of order.”

“Okay. A circle, a triangle, a rectangle, square a...? This one is different what is it?”

“It’s a pentagon. Look it has five sides. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. Here is another one. Is it the same?”

“No.”

“Why, what’s the difference?”

“It has six sides.”

“So you know what that is called?”

“No.”

“It’s called a hexagon. See, it has six sides. She put that one down on the carpet and picked up the other one. “What is this one called?”

“A pentagon,” I proudly stated.

“And why is this one a pentagon?”

“Cause it has five sides.”

“And this one?”

“A hexagon because it has six sides.”

Mary continues, “Now we have them sorted by number of sides; now let’s see how we could sort them differently. How could we do this?”

“By colour.”

“Excellent. Sort them by colour.” And the lesson continued. Jesse Green, who is 8, the oldest student Mary teaches, is profoundly deaf and has

also been diagnosed with autism. Concrete material is essential for teaching Jesse. Mary often uses me, even though I am much younger than Jesse, to go through a lesson series to see if she has the right kind of material to stimulate Jesse. It gives her a sense of how the lesson may go. I love being Mary's helper matching and categorizing shapes.

By the end of the lesson it's almost time to eat. I carefully put the transparent robot next to Mary's purse at the front door and collect the half empty bubble container. I run to the kitchen calling out, "What's for dinner I'm hungry?"

### *Hermeneutic Interlude*

When I reread this story the ongoing teaching and learning process that took place throughout my childhood, both through play (Paley, 1999) and directed learning, strikes me. According to Breunig (2005), "experiences that lack intention, purpose, and direction most often simply represent play. Play is fun; but play is not always enough, especially if there is some educational end toward which the practice (experience) is directed" (p. 107). I was given ample opportunities to experience play as a child, but I was also given many directed learning opportunities through formalized teaching experiences in and out of the classroom. Many of the teaching experiences I was exposed to were not haphazard.

I have lived with two experienced teachers for most of my life. They were both committed to their responsibilities as teachers: Mom as a French as a Second Language teacher at the college level and eventually working for the Ministry of Education as Co-ordinator of Francophone Affairs for the Colleges and Universities in Ontario, and Mary as a Preschool Deaf Educator. Growing up I was always included in their day-to-day lived experiences. According to Vellani (2004), "lived experience is always lived out of a body/subject, and is always lived within life" (p. 15). By openly sharing their stories I became a

part of the experiences they faced in their respective educational settings, and I believe I was exposed to more than what either Mom or Mary had ever intended; “hence, lived-experience always seeks to express more than what it has undergone” (Ricoeur cited in Vellani, p. 15). Meaning that I experienced an empathetic understanding rather than a rational understanding. A rational understanding tends to be interpreted more narrowly and can be measured, whereas an empathetic understanding has the potential to become embodied which is not measureable, not replicable, not generalizable, not objective and so forth (Van Manen, 1990).

Mary was a preschool teacher and worked with families in their home environments. Many issues that surfaced through her specialized work were openly shared with me. For example, I was exposed to the challenges families with multiple handicapped children faced that the public was not always made aware of. I heard stories about the heavy financial burden families faced due to medical bills. I was exposed to stories regarding marriages that could not withstand the challenges and the stigma of having and caring for a child with multiple handicaps. These marriages often ended in divorce, increasing the difficulties of caring for a child as a single parent. I was not shielded from the cruel realities of life. Some stories were heart wrenching.

One time Mary was involved in a Children’s Aid Society intervention. In one particular case I vividly remember Mary being asked to testify in a court hearing. She sat out in the hall of the courtroom the whole day waiting for her turn to testify and was never called upon. Instead she became witness to a system that sent the abused child back to his abusive father. She was devastated, and after I heard the story so was I.

“Story is a tool for self-discovery; stories tell us new things about ourselves that we wouldn’t have been as aware of without having told the story” (Atkinson, 1995, p. 3). Even though I was the recipient of this particular story and not the storyteller, I still learned a lot about myself on that day. I remember feeling such empathy for a boy I did not know, and for months afterwards I often wondered if he was okay. I also recall wondering how our legal system

could possibly send this boy back into the arms of his abusive father. How could this happen?

“Reflection and introspection help us put events and feelings in order. The more we reflect on what has happened, or how we feel, the clearer it all becomes” (Atkinson, 1995, p. 14). I have arrived at two conclusions as a result of writing this story. Perhaps Mom and Mary shared their stories to unload their daily burden and to assist them in putting their feelings in order. They needed to reflect and make sense of the day’s events and did so through the retelling of their stories. Second, for me, hearing the story and reflecting upon it gave me the opportunity to begin to understand how I felt about a situation, in this case, about the court’s decision to send an abused child back to his family. It gave me time to consider how I might position myself with regards to an abuse case in the future.

Our daily communion, sharing our day’s events through story as we sat down to dinner each evening, is an example of a lived experience basking in ritual. Not only were their stories openly shared, I was given the chance to discuss these experiences and ask questions and learn from each one. I was encouraged to engage in the realities of life. According to Van Manen (1990), “lived experience...has a temporal structure: it can never be grasped in its immediate manifestation but only reflectively as a past presence” (p. 36). I am only now beginning to fully grasp how these past experiences have permeated my actions in the present and how they have helped shape my teaching practice. In addition, “our appropriation of the meaning of lived experience is always of something past that can never be grasped in its full richness and depth since lived experience implicates the totality of life” (Van Manen, p. 36). The interpretive examination of these lived experiences opens the door for me to improve my teaching practice by allowing me to continually become aware of the totality of experiences that have helped form my identity as a learner, teacher, and teacher educator. This awareness allows me to approach each unique relationship fully aware of the possibilities that may exist. Are any of my students suffering from malnutrition? Do they have appropriate clothing for

each season? Are they getting enough sleep? Are they suffering from anxiety? Did they take their medication that morning? Are they well cared for? These are the questions I ask myself when I greet my students at the beginning of each day.

Is my sensitivity towards my students' basic needs (even before I consider their academic needs) a result of my exposure to the ongoing lived educational experiences that Mom and Mary shared with me? Is my holistic approach to the teaching and learning environment a result of the engagement I grew up experiencing? Can I teach beginning teachers how to become more sensitive to the needs of others even if they have not grown up in this milieu? Knowing and understanding how I came to embrace a holistic epistemology has allowed me to change my practice. An epistemology grounded in holism allowed me to explore material in new ways fostering a balance between process/product. I could teach and learn drawing on the imagination and intuition and not just on knowledge and rational thinking. I used qualitative approaches to assessment balanced with quantitative measures, and ultimately I had a holistic vision rather than one focused solely on technique (Hart, 2009). When I approached my teaching and learning practice this way "information remain[ed] unbounded, without preset limits, and available to flow in new forms" (Hart, p. 24). When information took on this form more than just a student's academic needs were met. Often their social, emotional, and spiritual needs were addressed since they became intimately involved in the teaching and learning process exploring subject matter that not only interested them but also resonated with them. "If material is only superficially understood or is too tightly bound, it will be insufficient to resonate within the student or the teacher. Material offered with depth is like a wonderful meal, sensuous and embodied; it makes us want to lick the plate and ask for more" (Hart, p. 24).

By understanding my teaching and learning practice from an epistemological position I am able to include beginning teachers in a dialogue of understanding and guide them to uncover and examine their own lived experiences. I tell them my story and they in turn begin to tell their story, and

through this engagement awareness is created. How this information is assimilated, or not, is up to the individual.

As I reread this autoethnographic account I became aware of the important role that toys played in my life. With Mary, I engaged in experiential learning opportunities as she prepared her daily lessons for her preschool students. I was not only encouraged to play (Paley, 1999), but I was also made aware of the function that a toy could perform as learning tool. Dewey (1938) believed that content should not be learned in isolation and that education should begin with student experience and should be contextual. When I was used as Jesse's "practice lesson student" I was exposed at a young age to the idea of how toys were purposefully used with the intent for teaching and learning to occur. When formulating his theory of experiential learning Dewey argued for the end of traditional rote learning saying that students should be active participants in building their knowledge and skills. Experiential learning was alive in my young life in the form of structured learning as well as unstructured play. It was through active hands-on engagements that I learned best. Now that I have explicitly unveiled the seed of where my inclination for experiential learning was planted, how will I use this knowledge to improve my teaching and learning practice?

Mary shared her frustration with me when her colleagues did not replace the educational toys. She would develop a whole lesson around a particular toy, and when she went into the school to return her toys and pick up new ones she often found that her colleagues had either not returned the toy she planned on using on time or the person was simply hoarding it. This was an ongoing challenge for Mary. I remember internalizing this problem and feeling badly for Mary when she did not have the tools necessary for her lesson to be successful. In my own teaching and learning practice, I have experienced the "teacher as hoarder" dilemma many times in the schools I have worked in. I always made it my practice to unconditionally share all my resources. I felt that if we all worked together in this manner, then our communal staff teaching and learning environment would be filled with the ethic of care, trust, integrity, and

respect the same qualities we espouse in our classrooms. I wonder if experiencing the hoarder dilemma vicariously through Mary's stories compelled me to be more conscientious with regards to the sharing of my resources in my own teaching and learning practice. When I examine the question how do I improve my practice through this particular story I believe there is value in coming to a deeper understanding of my current actions in order to continue to learn how to improve my practice. Teachers who shared their "teacher" stories brought me up. I was an active listener, absorbing the lessons they had learned along their educational journey. At present, I find myself in a similar situation with the beginning teachers I work with. As I continue to clarify my role as a teacher and come to this new understanding, I can share this information, or my stories, with this unique group. Perhaps they will begin to examine the lived experiences they have undergone and in turn analyze how these experiences may or may not affect their teaching practice.

I am also curious about the metaphor "toys" and how it plays out in my life. "Metaphors involve the transfer of images or ideas from one domain of reality to another" (Weinrauch, 2005, p. 109). For me, toys transfer into the image or idea of play, fun, joy, laughter, imagination, creativity, and vision to name just a few qualities that emerge from my interaction with toys. I can now sense how important they were for me in both a structured and unstructured setting. It was through play that I learned best. The organized play I undertook with Mary—play that had a specific outcome—told a story of where I was at developmentally. I had two at-home experts in the field of education who were able to ascertain my cognitive ability. Perhaps this is why when my report card came home, Mom and Mary knew that I was "worth" more than the number or grade on that piece of paper. They knew that there was *more* depth to my intelligence than the regurgitation of knowledge that was reflected in my term report. They cared for me unconditionally.

Unconditional love and a sense of family are evident throughout this story and a commitment to my development as a healthy person. When I reflect upon the story *Anticipation*, there is a level of consistency in the behaviours of



the characters in the story that reflect their intent to guide me along the developmental continuum. I always received a small gift from Mary when she returned from her week on the road, she always provided a toy for me to learn from and play with, and the foods we enjoyed to eat were provided. These simple acts reflect the *care* that I was familiar with as a child growing up. What energized, directed, and sustained my behaviour is whether my human needs were being met, the needs that motivated me to continue to thrive and grow as an individual. According to Maslow's (1968) Hierarchy of Needs, my lower needs, physiological, safety, belonging, and love needs were being nurtured and cared for by my Mom and Mary, and therefore my needs were being met. In addition to this care, they always set aside *time* for me. I was included in their conversations, I was encouraged to participate, and I was always listened to. In addition to their time investment, space was provided for me to play on my own, to explore my own creativity and imagination, and to be myself. Again, according to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, my needs of understanding and aesthetic needs were also being met. I was well on my way to self-actualization.

At first I was not sure why this became my first autoethnographic account, but then I realized that this childhood story helped build a strong foundation which met my needs as the developing healthy person I was to become. This story came to the surface as a fond memory from my childhood, probably because of the toys and the joy that came from play and from experiential learning. Traveling with Mary to her school and walking into a room full of toys has always been one of my fondest childhood memories. Play was always encouraged, both independent and structured. In her book *The Kindness of Children*, Vivian Paley (1999) shared a conversation with Reverend Jerry Flambeau when he said to her, "we become witnesses, we see who we are teaching, and we see who we are playing with, we see who we might be" (p. 28) when we experience play. I am happy I learned through experience, I am cared for, and I am loved in this story. I was flourishing under Maslow's (1968) foundational Hierarchy of Needs. What a gift.

## Narrative 2–Recollections

*“The past beats inside me like a second heart.”  
(Banville, 2005, p. 10)*

### *Prologue*

I read the novel *The Sea* by John Banville (2005) specifically to experience the ebb and flow of the literary device the flashback. Of course I did not do the flashback justice in comparison to the winner of the Man Booker Prize, but what I found interesting about writing utilizing the flashback is what I chose to use as my platform for creating the flashback, cycling, and the subsequent stories that fell out of that meditative state. I actually cycled to Rattlesnake Point the morning I started this piece and paid particular attention to the landscape, my breath, what I think about when I ride, and let the characters whom I wrote about come to the surface in an authentic writing as a method of inquiry (L. Richardson, 2000) kind of way; naturally, in the moment and without thought but rather flow. I enjoyed the challenge of writing this piece with this type of structure.

### *In the Now*

I am going through a period of uncertainty right now. All the time spent, literally years, working towards the writing of this dissertation has come to a fusion of horizons. I feel like the little Inukshuk overshadowed by the polar bear in the monochromatic painting entitled *Nunavut* that I bought my Mom in Quebec City 2 years ago while chaperoning the end-of-the-year grade 8 school trip. I am that tiny speck, way off in the distance, where the perspective points converge. I have so many stories swirling around in my head, and I

don't know which ones need to be told. My internal landscape is filled with reminiscences and recollections of my past. As Banville (2005) expresses in his novel *The Sea*, "And yet what existence, really, does it have, the past? After all, it is only what the present was, once, the present that is gone, no more than that. And yet" (p. 45). Banville, articulates the past so succinctly...and yet. It is the "and yet" that has me under her spell. And yet what? What is hidden behind those two words? I need to get out on my bike and ride my way to an answer. As I prepare my purple road bike for my long ride to Rattlesnake Point, I turn my attention to Miss Ruskin.

#### *Purple Pant Suit*

She is the first teacher that has worn pants to work. "Can you believe it?" we cry out in hushed tones throughout the playground. School hasn't even begun for the day, and yet we all know that our teacher, Miss Ruskin, has arrived to work wearing purple pants. News travels fast in a small elementary school.

When Miss Ruskin enters the class we are all sitting up straight in our seats, row upon row, just waiting to catch a glimpse of this woman wearing pants to work. Who is she? Times sure are changing. Is she the only female on staff who is bold enough to wear pants? I think she is pretty cool. As she waltzes across the front of the room landing at her desk, her long, lean figure sets off the purple bell-bottoms and matching jacket. The pantsuit becomes her. While we stand at attention for Oh Canada and the Lord's Prayer, we get a good look at how co-ordinated and colourful she is with her pale pink top underneath

the plum-colored hip-length jacket. When morning announcements are complete we sit back down in our seats and get down to the day's lessons.

By midmorning, right after our recess break, the woman in the purple pant suit pulls out a small, round pitch pipe from her desk drawer and blows into one of the small round holes, striking a perfect C note. We immediately all hum what we think is a perfect C. "Now class, turn to page 37 in your music books," she instructed. And with that command, out come our hardbound red singing books. Red River Valley is found on the page. I love singing this song. The melody is so smooth, and the lyrics flow with the music. She gets us started, and all together we sing in unison, no alto or bass parts, we sing as a whole ensemble while our leader walks up and down each aisle, leading us with her beautiful soprano voice:

Come and sit by my side if you love me  
Do not hasten to bid me adieu  
But remember the Red River Valley  
And the cowboy who loved you so true.

By the time we finish our music session we had become unaware of what we thought was daring attire earlier this morning, and the woman singing in unison with us becomes our Miss Ruskin once again, the charming teacher with the short brown hair and spontaneous laugh.

### *Decisions*

Once my bike is prepped I have a decision to make. I live halfway up the Niagara Escarpment. When I leave my house to go cycling I have two choices: turn left and climb straight up the escarpment for the first 10 minutes

of my ride before I am warmed up *or* turn right and pick up speed immediately, traveling very fast, upwards of 50 km per hour, as indicated on my on board computer, on a steep downhill for the next 4 or 5 minutes, weaving in and out of Stop signs along the way. The decision should seem fairly simple, and yet. If I take the hill at the outset of my ride, then the last few kilometers of my ride are downhill right to my door. On the other hand, if I travel the fast downhill at the beginning of my ride, then I am left with a straight uphill climb at the end of my ride, finishing on a steep incline. There are pros and cons to both scenarios which I am not going to get into at this moment. Cycling helps me to think. The cyclic nature of the pedal stroke leads me into a kind of meditative state where my thoughts circulate over in my mind as my heel makes its way through the down stroke followed by a subtle ankling technique that shifts the front part of my foot down too. This is seamlessly followed by a lifting motion that culminates at the top of the pedal stroke followed by an all-out assault in a downward thrust through the center of the pedal stroke. The repetitive nature allows my mind to wander. Whether I am cycling north towards Rattlesnake Point, the steepest hill in Halton Hills, or down towards Lake Ontario, both routes offer me the time to move closer to the horizon where my layered stories converge.

*Mr. Parker*

*Man in Society*, as it was called in those days, was taught by Mr. Parker, a large man with a short stature that accentuated his girth I imagine. He wore square, black-rimmed glasses with thick lenses, oversized jeans with a belt

to hold them up leveled just below his paunch that spilled over his brown leather strap. It is funny to me how I remember teachers by their attire. Miss Ruskin in a purple pantsuit and Mr. Parker in oversized jeans. A short-sleeved plaid shirt always accompanied his jeans. He wore the same pants every day of the week but changed his shirt daily. The only reason I know this is because he had different patterns of plaid for each day of the week. I often wondered how he carried his robust weight up and down three flights of stairs to our third floor classroom.

Mr. Parker spoke with a thick Irish accent even though I believe he had lived in Canada for most of his life. I felt a great empathy for Mr. Parker. By grade 12, I didn't concern myself with being identified as the "teacher's pet." I just felt that Mr. Parker needed someone to assist him so I became what I call his audio visual or "AV" assistant. Before each class I would search him out, usually in the geography office which he shared with the other male geography teachers, and begin my routine. "So what do you need today Mr. Parker? A filmstrip projector, an overhead projector, a movie projector, or anything from the library?"

"I need an overhead projector today, Hilary," (he always rolled the 'l' in Hilary), "you can find it with Mr. Tan in Room 311 just down the hall." And off I would go to fetch his overhead projector. Before each class I had his equipment set up for him, ready the instant he entered the room.

Every class with Mr. Parker was an adventure into the unknown. Today was no exception. When everyone settled into their seats Mr. Parker lit

up the overhead and placed a visual of a triangle that was divided into multicoloured sections down onto the glass surface. He turned the dial on the arm of the overhead to adjust the focus. Now I could see that each section of the triangle had writing in it. He pulled out a small, shiny object from his pocket that looked like a silver pen. He took one end and extended it, transforming it into a pointer. Using the pointer like a conductor, he began. "While Abraham Maslow worked with monkeys early in his career as a behaviourist, he noticed that some needs take precedence over others. For example if you are hungry and thirsty, you will tend to try and take care of the thirst first, right Robby?" He tapped the pointer down on Robby's desk.

"Absolutely, Mr. Parker."

"Pay attention lad, you may learn something today. After all, you can do without food for weeks, but you can only do without water for a couple of days. Thirst is a stronger..." he tapped the pointer with more authority this time, "...need than hunger." He turned to face the window as if his audience was the world. "Likewise if you can't breathe, what is more important, water or breathing?" He turned and looked Karen straight in the eye. "Breathing of course." He began to pace across the front of the room. "On the other hand, sex is less powerful than any of these. Let's face it, you won't die if you don't get it, right Robby!"

"I don't know about that Mr. Parker, but you've got my attention now!" We broke into a crescendo of laughter. Mr. Parker was a gifted orator. He had us in the palm of his hand. I think that is what I admired most about

him. He didn't take any backtalk from any of his students. He earned our respect.

He continued, "Abraham Maslow took this idea and created what you see before you now, his famous motivational theory based on this Hierarchy of Needs." From there he went on to explain in great detail each section of the triangle, starting from the bottom and working his way up to the apex.

I sat in silence, completely mesmerized by the whole concept. This was the first time that I conceptually understood a theory. It literally transformed how I viewed the world. At the top of the triangle were two words *self* and *actualization*. The very words themselves resonated deep within a space inside me that had never been visited before. The word self was, well, self-evident. For me it meant, literally, me and who I am. But the verb actualization, to make something come about, was a new term that would become my personal mantra. For the first time I felt empowered. I believed that I could make myself become who I wanted to become if I worked myself up towards the top of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. I knew I was already on my way. My physiological needs of oxygen, water, minerals, vitamins, and so forth were met. Check. My safety needs of stability and protection were met. Check. My sense of belonging and love needs were met from a family point of view. Check. But I was still working on a sense of belonging at school and with friends, and my esteem needs were still in need of a boost due to my below-average report card marks. Three quarters of a check mark. I had a ways to go before I could reach the apex of the triangle and become fully self-



actualized. “Once your lower needs are taken care of, at least to a considerable extent, then you can begin to move towards the top. When you reach the top you will become the most complete, the fullest *you*; hence the term self-actualization. See you all tomorrow.”

As I unplugged the overhead machine and started winding up the cord I could see Mr. Parker’s overhead still on the glass plate. I just couldn’t get that triangle model out of my mind. The shape of the triangle in relation to the concept made so much sense to me. I could see that not everyone would reach self-actualization, for it was the narrowest part of the shape. I didn’t want to be in that group. I wanted to become self-actualized. I could also sense the importance of the wide foundation at the bottom and therefore, how important my physiological needs were as well as my belonging, love, and esteem needs. These had to be met before I could reach for the other more abstract need of self-actualization. Because of the shape of the model itself, I could explain Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs the minute I walked out of Mr. Parker’s classroom, which was no easy feat for me. Memorization wasn’t something I could accomplish with ease. I took the transparency and placed it on Mr. Parker’s notes. “Thanks for a great class Mr. Parker! See you tomorrow!”

“Thanks for your assistance as always, Hilary.” And off I went to return the projector.

### *Hills*

I turned left and started up the steep slope. The route I am riding today will take me through the village of Kilbride. Thoughts of teachers past and

present flow seamlessly in and out of the now. I check to make sure I have my cell phone with me in case I get a flat tire and felt it in the bottom of my jersey pocket. As I make my way around the wooded area at the top of my street I hear cardinals and woodpeckers competing for airspace. I adjust my gear and turn onto the main road that will lead me up the escarpment. The tailwind has now become a crosswind. My breath quickens with every pedal stroke, but without delay I refocus and maintain a steady pace. I don't want to choose my lowest gear just yet because I know the steepest part of my ride has yet to make an appearance. Psychologically, moving into my lowest gear now would be disastrous at this point in time. I continue to climb, getting stronger as I approach the switchback. I know the wind will be directly in my face when I make the turn. A deer juts out onto the road just in front of me. I immediately put on my brakes. "Well hello there," I say to the brown and tan coloured buck. He takes one look at me with a startled gaze and then quickly reenters the ravine, deciding not to cross the road. I have to buckle down and gain my lost momentum. As the road starts to veer left towards the final part of the ascent, I come face to face with a strong headwind. I gear down, lower my head, and push through each pedal stroke as efficiently as I possibly can. It is a short incline, but it is steep. As I approach the apex I feel like I am reaching the top of Maslow's Hierarchy. I want to throw my hands in the air and yell at the top of my lungs, *I have become self-actualized!* but I know better. This is only one of many hills I have yet to climb today. My thoughts tumble back to a time where I faced a challenge of a different sort.

*Paint by Numbers*

When I entered Mrs. Jenkins's Grade 5 class at the end of the hall, the class set-up was quite different than grade 4. Instead of having rows of self-contained desks with compartments built into our desks for our learning materials, we sat at round tables that were strategically placed throughout the room. There were four students placed at each table. Square compartments were built onto one wall. Our names were neatly printed above our own personal cubby. This is where I kept my workbooks, my math textbook, my reader, and my blue pencil case with the white stripe. I liked the idea of round tables; I thought it would make learning more fun. However, it didn't take long before it became evident that the center round table was reserved for the neatest and smartest students. Kenneth, Donnella, Tanya, and Jasmine sat at the middle table. I can remember how meticulous all of their handwriting was, and our teacher held this skill in the highest regard. Mrs. Jenkins is what I call a perfectionist. One of her measures of intelligence was the neatness of a student's work. In addition to being a perfectionist, she was also a gifted artist. She could draw and draw well. As a matter of fact, her work was often up for display around the room. I remember one particular art lesson when I had to draw a bowl of fruit. I could draw the fruit but it did not look like fruit. What I thought was shaped like a banana was filled in yellow, but that is about it. I had difficulty making it look real. I didn't have the knack for perspective or shading.

I looked up from my table and I could see a line up of students marching towards Mrs. Jenkins's desk. Like a good soldier I marched up too. After I had my one-on-one visit with her, my bowl of fruit looked perfect. She had "fixed" my artwork so that now the fruit looked realistic. She should have had us paint by numbers I thought to myself. My drawing didn't make it to the display bulletin boards scattered around the room, which did not surprise me. However, I do remember that the art Mrs. Jenkins selected looked perfect. Our classroom resembled a professional art gallery. All that was missing was a child's creativity.

### *The Test*

As I continue to push the pedals on my purple Cannondale road bike, I travel closer to my next climb, Rattlesnake Point. Am I fit enough? Will I be able to make it up without stopping to rest? I remember the first time I climbed this memorable ascent. I had just moved to Mississauga and met a fellow triathlete who was looking for a training partner. One day, Mac led me on a ride northwest towards Milton and beyond. Unbeknownst to me, our destination was Rattlesnake Point. As we approached Bell School Line he casually mentioned that there would be a "hill" coming up. When I first turned onto Bell School Line it appeared to be an unassuming "hill" as Mac had indicated in his voice. However, about 200 meters away, the tree-lined road narrowed and turned up towards the right, quickly disappearing behind a canopy of trees. This should have been my first clue. Then a yellow sign, just before the first bend, had a wiggly line with an arrow pointing up, indicating

that the road I was about to encounter had twists and turns. This should have been my second clue. I geared down and started my ascent.

At first glance the gentle turn seemed to be just that, but within five peddle strokes I was on a 35-degree slope. Where did that come from? Maybe the shadows from the tree-covered road hindered my perception. No, it was the gentle curve in the road that hid the incline from my sight. The steepness and intensity at which the road increased throughout the meandering lane diverted my attention from what was until then a routine training ride. I had not anticipated a climb of this magnitude. By this time I was out of my saddle pushing down on each pedal stroke with all of my might. Mac was getting an earful as I suffered through what seemed like a never-ending ascent. I was voluntarily sharing with him every expletive I knew as I continued to make my way up this torturous route.

Today, 20 years later, as I ascend her yet again, I find myself laughing out loud as I recall that day. It was so typically Hilary. As carefree as I sometimes appear to be, I need to be psychologically prepared for such events. Mac did not adequately prepare me. He felt that by not sharing the details of the climb he was actually doing me a favour. Assumptions get in the way all too frequently. This morning I mentally prepared myself for the intensity of the climb and the pain I will undoubtedly experience as I mount this climb. I know this hill inside and out. It is simply mind over matter. From almost the first stroke down on the pedal I push everything I physically have into a cadence that will successfully grant me access to the top. I know where I need to attack the

hill and where I can hold back. I do not need to get out of the saddle but instead stay seated and as relaxed as possible. This is the sign of an experienced rider.

On this quiet Wednesday morning I note that I am able to take in the sounds, the mood, and the moment as I climb. There is no one to chastise today as I work through the pain. I am a solitary rider. I can hear my breathing between a stream of running water that is flowing down a creek that has channeled its way into a gully parallel to the road. I can hear my breathing between the layers of birds chirping, singing, and calling out to one another. I can hear my breathing while I watch a hawk come in for a landing on a fencepost not 10 meters from where I climb. I can hear my breathing and enjoy the stunning view across a pristine rural landscape all the way to Toronto just before the final switchback.

In the final push up to the point, there is a sharp left onto the steepest stretch. In my lowest gear I hold on to my cadence and press on. The sheer steepness grabs a hold of my legs, my heart, and my lungs and it does not let go. There is less than 100 meters to the top, but it feels like an eternity. Once I have traversed the switchback and ascended the steepest section, I focus my attention on the final 10 meters, a less steep portion of the incline at the tail end of the ascent. This is what I call the character builder or the “CB” part of the ride. Years ago when I was training for the Ironman, I used to code my workouts. The really challenging workouts, the training sessions that I still cannot believe to this day that I made it through, were initialed with CB. I always believed that those were the workouts that made me who I am. The

final 10 meters of Rattlesnake Point is a CB. Even though it is a lot less steep than the switchback, it comes at the end of a long, challenging climb. My body is trying to convince my mind that she has had enough, but my mind keeps her companion moving. As I push through over the crest, I have made it to the top once again. I make a mental note to write CB in my workout journal.

*Why Didn't I Do Anything About It?*

The year is 1975. I remember the day Mrs. Harris, my homeroom teacher, called me and four other girls into her classroom. I was in a particularly rowdy class with many unruly individuals that were known for being disruptive and not terribly attentive and/or interested learning. As a class, we lived up to this expectation on a daily basis. Mrs. Harris, who also taught us English, was a seasoned teacher with exemplary classroom management skills. She kept us in line. We respected her. Unfortunately, she had to take a leave of absence due to illness for a couple of months, and in her absence we undeniably became the most unruly class in grade 8.

When she made a brief appearance to announce that she was going to retire at March Break, she took the five of us aside for a chat. She knew what was happening in her absence. She bluntly asked us how we could have possibly let this kind of behaviour happen while she was away and proceeded to question *why we didn't do anything about it?* I still admire her integrity in confronting us. It caused me to reflect upon my actions in her absence, since I surely would not have behaved this way if she had been at the front of the room. Why did I stand by and watch while the students in my class demoralized

teachers and caused them to have nervous breakdowns? Why did I join in on many occasions? Why didn't I try to put a stop to this type of behaviour instead of becoming a participant? Mrs. Harris' caring manner and what I believe to be wise actions on that day had a profound effect on me. It was a CB moment. I do not believe she would have taken the time and effort to have such a conversation with me had she not believed in my individual potential. I think she believed that by confronting me with some difficult questions, perhaps I might face up and take responsibility for my part in the disruptive nature of the class. If she was correct, then perhaps the next time I was faced with a similar situation I might behave differently.

### *Aesthetic Pleasure*

The road home from Rattlesnake Point is almost anticlimactic except for the stunning landscape that penetrates my view. There is something so innocent in a rural landscape: the undulating land without fences that delineate ownership. A newly painted barn sits proudly next to a house that has crisp white gables that decorate its peak. An inviting wraparound porch has a swing that seats two. I can see sheep quietly grazing in the meadow, and in the air a mixture of smells, something between freshly cut grass and manure, fill my senses. I love this part of the ride. It is the reward after the climb.

### *History Comes to Life*

"Mr. Fritz chose *us* to work down in the cafeteria!" I explained to the rest of my group excitedly.

"Really?" replied Susie in a voice just as surprised as my own.



"I can't believe it, especially after the whole 'note' incident," Tammy piped in.

"Sssshhhhh," Sharrie motioned softly, "he may be able to hear you, and that would ruin our chances," she insisted.

"Let's get our information on Louis Riel and go down to the cafe now," Jessica said authoritatively. Jessica was the taskmaster. She was always so well organized and always had an abundance of information on any topic she chose to research. I have known her since elementary school. In grade 4 we did a project together on the brain. I remember reading our information into a tape recorder (so we didn't have to present orally in front of the class), thinking how foreign the words were: the medulla oblongata, the cerebellum, the frontal, parietal, occipital, and temporal lobes, the corpus callosum, just to name a few. The sound of the words trickled off my tongue, but I didn't have a clue what each word meant. She had collected all the information. I can't recall what my role was in the project. Her parents were both school teachers; her father was a librarian, and her mother a math teacher. Both had high expectations for her. I always felt that there was a constant pressure on her to succeed. Tammy on the other hand was naturally smart, but her parents didn't expect her to go to university or even college, so she just had to pass and graduate from high school to please her parents. She always managed to get marks in the high 70s with what seemed to me very little effort. I was envious. Susie was brilliant and a gifted pianist. I remember going over to her house and begging her to play *The Entertainer* from my favourite movie, *The Sting*. She never wanted to

play in front of people. But when she did she lit up the keyboard. Gosh, I wished I could play like that. She wanted to become a secretary, but I always felt she had so much more potential than that. The last member of our little ensemble was Sherrie. She was the person who got along with everyone. She was enjoyable to be around, and she was smart and a solid athlete too.

For the next few classes we studied our history textbook along with the other resources Jessica had collected. We summarized the important events that would allow us to tell the story of Louis Riel. "We need to block out the scenes on the stage," I suggested. I always wanted to get right down to the action part of things.

"Who is going to play Louis Riel?" asked Tammy, "do you want to Hilary?"

"No, I want to play Gabriel Dumont," I replied, "he is a real warrior!"

"Then you won't be hung," Tammy laughed, "you'll go and live your life in the Wild West Show!"

"You mean hanged," Jessica corrected.

"Whatever."

"I'll play him," volunteered Sherrie.

"Then you will die even though you are innocent," reminded Susie, "How do you feel about that?"

"How are we going to hang her?" asked Tammy, "I mean how will we show the hanging, I mean we can't really hang her, but how will we portray it, that's the word I'm looking for."

“Can I remind everyone that I am just playing Louis Riel. I am starting to get a little worried when you are saying *she* when referring to the hanging!” insisted Sherrie. Everyone chuckled.

It was such a privilege to be in the group selected to work outside the classroom, down the hall, away from direct teacher supervision and to think Mr. Fritz had selected us in spite of *our* most recent incident with him.

Mr. Fritz had a poster of a pig on his bulletin board. The caption read “male chauvinist pig” under the cartoon like picture. Today, looking back on this blatant advertisement, I imagine that perhaps he was just poking fun at feminists, but at the time I challenged him often about the message that his poster depicted.

On one particular day a couple of weeks before our work on the Red River Settlement got underway, I passed a not so complimentary note about Mr. Fritz and his male chauvinism covertly to Susie while he was delivering one of his lessons. She continued the rant, added her two cents, and passed it on to Jessica, and so forth down the line. It wasn’t a note that we expected Mr. Fritz to read. It criticized him, challenged his male chauvinism, and on top of that it made fun of his idiosyncratic tendencies that adolescent students are so good at picking up on. On the way out of his class, one of us, the last one to read the note I suspect, placed it in his garbage can without tearing it up. Being the observant teacher he was with incredible “withitness,” he picked it out of the garbage.

While we sat in French class there was a call over the PA system

directing all five of us up to his classroom after school. We put two and two together and figured out that Mr. Fritz had somehow got hold of the note. In what we would call “girl power solidarity” today, we denied writing the note. Our names weren’t on it, but our sentiments towards his gender bias, the annoying poster that sat front and center in his classroom, were evident. There was no excuse for our attack on his idiosyncratic tendencies. Maybe the reason he allowed us to work in the cafeteria on such a creative project was not as a result of our ability to work independently after all, but an act to demonstrate to us that he was not a male chauvinist. Whatever the reason, we were being allowed to work independently on such a creative project; in the end, dramatically bringing to life the events that led to the North-West Rebellion and the role that Louis Riel played was a time in history that I came to really understand and appreciate.

### *Road Home*

The wind remained in my favour along the flat road leading me home. A strong tailwind made my ride so much easier. I pass a golf course and pause just long enough to watch a man tee off on the 15<sup>th</sup> hole. I cycle alongside his drive and watch until it comes down neatly in the middle of the fairway. He benefited from the tailwind as well. Sweet. As I continue along the windy road, not 7 kilometers from my home, I can see the strawberry pickers up ahead. There must be 10 or 12 of them, all visible minorities, bent over doing this backbreaking work. I appreciate their hard work since I know that tonight after dinner I will be enjoying those very strawberries that were hand-picked

today. I will bow my head and give them thanks. The time on my bike has been productive. Many stories have emerged, and many more have been stored away for future reference. I still feel like the tiny Inukshuk in the painting entitled *Nunavut*, but the fusion of horizons seems more seamless somehow. The stories have started to shake loose and rise to the surface. For the final 5 minutes of my ride I access speeds of 55 km/hr as I tuck into an aerodynamic position and retrace my initial ascent. I am still pondering the existence of my past in the present, and yet for today it is enough to end on the downhill.

### *Hermeneutic Interlude*

The literary device, flashback, which is an interjected scene that takes the narrative back in time from the current point the story has reached, plays a vital role in the hermeneutic turn. I am recollecting my past in light of my present teaching expertise and my daily athletic pursuits. As a matter of fact it is through the physical effort that I expend cycling that my mind is able to wander and stories about my own educational experiences emerge. This happens on a daily basis for me. Exercise allows me to build a strong physical foundation, and it provides me with a platform from which I can attempt to understand the world and my place in it. It opens a space for me to pedal my way, or step my way into a meditative state. In this particular narrative, cycling is the platform from which I recollect a number of teachers that played a role in my personal development.

Teachers such as Miss Ruskin, Mr. Parker, Mrs. Jenkins, Mr. Fritz, and Mrs. Harris all had distinct teaching styles. I have internalized many of their practices, keeping in mind that learning *what not to do* also falls under the rubric of learning. There are many other teachers I learned from as well, but for some reason these five teachers became a part of this (re)collection. Hopefully by the end of this hermeneutic interlude I will come to some understanding of why this particular group of teachers came to be a part of this flashback piece.

Some of the scenarios I wrote about explicitly depict what I learned, while others were more implicit in their meaning. But in all cases it took years for me to be able to articulate how the underlying lessons these teachers either explicitly or implicitly taught me, whether deliberate or not, became a part of my epistemology as a practicing teacher. The instructional strategies I flourished under as a learner are the strategies I gravitated towards and adopted as a teacher practitioner. This was no accident. I learned best when experiential learning opportunities were provided. I learned best conceptually. I learned best when someone challenged my actions. In turn, whether right or wrong, I made the assumption that the students I worked with would also learn best if I used experiential learning moments, used conceptual frameworks, and was fair but firm when working with students.

After reading this piece thoroughly a number of times, what became apparent to me is that the Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession as outlined in the Ontario College of Teachers Foundations of Practice (2006) of care, respect, trust, and integrity were embodied by the teachers who made a difference in my life. It also became apparent that the teachers with whom I had the most challenges did not uphold the Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession. According to Noddings (1984) “it is generally agreed that ethics is the philosophical study of morality” (p. 26). Therefore, I could use the terms ethical and/or moral interchangeably in my interpretation of how these particular teachers influenced me. In doing so “I am assuming that to behave ethically is to behave under the guidance of an acceptable and justifiable account of what it means to be moral” (Noddings, p. 27). However, I have chosen to use the term ethical to describe their actions since it is in alignment with the ethical standards for the teaching profession. For example, Mrs. Harris demonstrated all four ethical standards listed above, when she took me aside and asked me to reflect on my actions with regards to our rambunctious grade 8 class. If she had not cared about me, put her trust in me, believing that I could make a difference, or if she lacked respect for me or did not embody integrity herself, she would never have taken the time to go out of her way and challenge

my actions. When she challenged me I became aware of my role, and then I had a choice to make. I could take action and change my present and/or future behaviour or ignore her guidance. I chose the former and have called upon her teachings many times throughout my life both as a student and as a teacher.

On the other hand, in light of my schooling experience, I did not feel Mrs. Jenkins upheld the Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession. The care she provided was towards a certain type of learner, one that excelled intellectually, and not the entire student population under her tutelage. This, in my opinion, was unethical. She did not demonstrate care, respect, trust or integrity towards me. I believe, if she did uphold the ethical standards then she would have differentiated the instruction and allowed me, and other students like me, to create meaning in our own unique way under her guidance. From the vantage point from which I view the teaching and learning process today, I believe her integrity, as a teacher would be called into question by favouring a small group of students over others based on their ability to excel intellectually. This being said, I am fully aware that my experience in Mrs. Jenkins's class is not the same as another student's experience and that she may very well have upheld the ethical standards according to another student's experience.

Another observation I made was that the teaching strategies a teacher employed greatly influenced my capacity to learn and to grasp concepts with ease. If a teacher used an approach that tapped into Gardner's (1983, 1999) visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, and personal intelligences, rather than solely using a linguistic approach utilizing paper and pencil tasks, then I was more likely to succeed. In addition, if a teacher chose to use a hands-on approach where I could learn through a cycle of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), then once again I was not only more likely to succeed, but enduring deep understanding tended to ensue. Both Mr. Parker and Mr. Fritz used these innovative teaching methods and strategies that allowed me to visualize and contextualize their subject matter. A visual representation of Maslow's (1968) Hierarchy of Needs presented in Mr. Parker's Man in Society class tapped into my visual intelligence (Gardner) or visual learning style. I was captivated by

the visual metaphor of a triangle that encapsulated the very essence of Maslow's conceptual framework. I could visualize the intent of his motivational theory. Today I continue to use his theory as a guide when assessing the needs of students. In the second example, a dramatic presentation of the hanging of Louis Riel in Mr. Fritz's history class left an enduring effect on me. Working through Kolb's cycle of learning, the concrete experience of reading various texts about Louis Riel provided me with a basis for observation and reflection. I was then able to assimilate this knowledge and interpret it with the help of my group members. We then created a script and distilled this information into abstract concepts, producing new implications for action that were actively tested through our dramatic representation. By actively participating in the dramatization of Riel's premature death, I was changed. I have always felt that Riel ethically and morally stood up for something he believed in and died doing so. For me, there was something very noble and courageous in his actions. I wonder if his example has guided my own moral compass on numerous occasions. Both of these learning opportunities, a visual and an experiential approach, guided me to a deeper, more permanent learning experience. Both of these classroom encounters led to a transformational experience and ultimately filtered into my ontology and epistemology.

When I focus on the mode of cycling as the theme that allowed me to use the literary device flashback, it becomes evident in the cycling narrative that I embrace challenges. I enjoy the process of working through each challenge as I experience it. I press on and learn something from each one, thus the "character builder" reference in the narrative. Each experience, whether it be climbing a short hill or a steep hill, choosing a gear, or making a decision of whether to climb or descend, becomes part of my character as I continually change and transform. This is a key dynamic for me with regards to teaching and learning, for if I do not "walk through the gate" and keep challenging myself, learning and experiencing new things, and developing myself, who will? How can my teaching practice improve if I do not keep working on improving myself whatever that may look like for me? By continually



engaging with the world outside of my teaching and learning practice, what I embody from those experiences becomes a form of professional development.

Second is the underlying metaphor that is suggested by the physical challenges I face while cycling. “In this sense, metaphoric language is the ‘soul’ of interpretation and is as much about the ‘seeing-as’ of something, as it is about the ‘seeing-as-not’” (Vellani, 2004, p. 9). In other words, the inherent physical challenges and decision-making processes I experienced when cycling became the mirror for all the challenges I faced in my teaching and learning practice. Perhaps choosing cycling as a metaphor was no accident but rather “a dynamic tension of being and not-being, which in turn provokes mimesis forward to become plot and reference of human action. Metaphorical discourse brings back our belonging to *a* world. It invites us to do hermeneutics” (Vellani, pp. 9-10). Cycling then, and its inherent physical challenges may have become the vehicle, or metaphor, by which layered meaning was unveiled. I just needed to keep searching between the pleats and folds to unlock its intent.

### **Narrative 3—Coronation Park**

*“In order for a child to acquire a basic trust in the world, she must encounter nature as well as humanity” (LaChapelle cited in Plotkin, 2008, p. 92).*

#### *Invitation*

“Let’s go for a walk down by the lake,” Mom suggests, “we can look for colours in the leaves, in the sky, in the water, in the pebbles on the beach, and in the flowers along the pine-scented trail together.” I am an eager participant in our morning ritual and quickly accept her invitation. I run to the front hall, sit on the floor, and struggle to put my runners on without untying my shoelaces. “Do I need a jacket?” I call out from the front hall not realizing she has gone to her bedroom to get changed. It doesn’t matter. I am ready in an instant and pace back and forth, impatiently awaiting her arrival. “Come on Mom, let’s go!”

We live a short walk from Coronation Park on Lake Ontario. Most mornings Mom and I venture down the water's edge and skip stones, inspect the dead, bloated fish carcasses, watch the seaweed dance, and then walk the path that runs through the park and over the arching drawbridge down to the lake and back to the parking lot. One time we tried to save a fish that had washed up on the shore. We brought it home and put it in a big tank that we had filled with lake water. But by morning it had flipped itself within the confined space and had spilled out onto the basement floor. That day I learned that you can't confine a big fish but instead must let it survive in its own environment.

*Bent Like a Bow by Nature*

As we walk along the path we stop and sit under the big willow tree at the far end of the park and silently listen to the birds and comment on the smells that spring from this place. Mom walks over to a pile of branches at the base of the willow tree. "Look at this Hilary." She picks up a short branch and inspects it. She grips the top and places the other end on the ground stamping it down two or three times to test its strength. She then begins to use it as a walking stick. "This is perfect don't you think?" she asks me rhetorically, "Look, it is bent like a bow by nature."

"Let me find one too," I insist. I rummage through the pile and discard many branches; some are too short and some are too tall. All of a sudden I find the one that is just right for me and test it out by stamping it down one, two,

three times before selecting it. "Mine is bent like a bow by nature too, Mom," I insist.

"It is!" she agrees and off we go, two companions meandering along the wood chip trail. After a short distance the path makes its way down to the beach. "Ahhh, look at the colour of the water today. It sure is an interesting blue," Mom points out. I jump up on a displaced log on the beach and look out across the flat surface. Sure enough the water is reflecting the sun's rays with a unique tinge of blue.

"I like it when the water is calm and I can see the different colours," I add.

### *Big Questions*

Mom sits down on the end of the log, places both her hands on the top of her walking stick and then rests her chin down on top of her hands and continues to gaze out over the water. She is deep in thought. Suddenly she looks over at me and asks, "If I told you that we live in a spectrum Hilary, what do you think it would look like?"

Mom always asks me questions with words I don't know. As I balance on the log, carefully walking back and forth trying to stay on top by supporting myself with my walking stick, I answer her. "Well I think a spectrum is filled with all the colours of the rainbow, the blues, the reds, the purples, the browns, the oranges and the yellows."

"How would you feel if someone only saw his life through one single colour—green?"

I jump off the log and skip towards the water. I pick up a stone and look back at her. "Well, I would feel sorry for him."

"Why?"

"Because he lives in a green world where everything is the same and that would make his life dull."

"What would make it better?"

"His world?"

"Yes, his world."

"Well, all the other colours. They would make his life magic." I skip the stone across the water's flat surface and it skips across the water four times before it disappears below the surface.

"Like what?"

"There's the red, and blue, and pink, and purple, and yellow, and orange, and of course there's black and white."

Mom likes to ask big questions. One time she asked me, "If we are in the same room are we in the same environment?" She tells everyone that at my age I knew that we were not in the same environment because I said that she was big and I was small and that she was looking out the window and I was looking out the door and that we had had different experiences. She makes me feel smart.

### *Art Imitates Life*

When we arrive home from our morning adventure to Coronation Park, I immediately change my clothes for my afternoon kindergarten class and Mom

goes directly into the dining room where her typewriter is set up and begins furiously tap, tap, tapping away on the keys. I am excited to go to school.

The next thing I remember is getting into bed that same night. Mom is introducing me to Mr. Green Count, a funny man who sees the world through green-coloured glasses in her new story. And I am center stage, as the main character, teaching that man all about the new colours in the world. It is a spirited story, and I am a happy camper as I watch the many colours blinking at me as I say goodnight.

### *Hermeneutic Interlude*

This is a story that has been mythologized throughout my life. The walks I shared with my Mom in Coronation Park during the fifth year of my life became the setting in a children's story written by my Mom. I have read *The Story of the Green Count* many times throughout the various stages in my life. In the story I am the protagonist who is listener, visionary, and guide. I metaphorically take the Green Count's hand and help him see all the "colours" in the world. According to Hoskins and Leseho (1996) "we use metaphors to bridge one idea to another. Metaphors are not only used to describe the self; they also shape the self" (p. 243). With this thought in mind, did reading this fictional story about myself shape my future teacher self? Did this story mirror the traits I would strive to embody in my own teaching practice?

According to Van Manen (1990):

...lived experience is always something past that can never be grasped in its full richness and depth since lived experience implicates the totality of life. The interpretive examination of lived experience has this methodical feature of relating the particular to the universal, part to whole, episode to totality. (p. 36)

Throughout my life I have examined the illustration I drew at 5 years of age of the spectrum that accompanied *The Story of the Green Count*. I drew an oval

shape and with multicoloured markers I drew alternating coloured lines connecting the sides of the oval on the inside of the shape. I drew myself in the middle of the spectrum as a tiny stick person with a big smile. I drew the Green Count as a much larger figure than my own. He is sitting outside the spectrum on a green hill and his frown makes him look very sad. I have always wondered how Hilary at 5 years of age came to interpret and hence draw the spectrum in such a manner. I have always been the type of person who seeks to understand more than what I have undergone.

This story has become a seminal story in my life and perhaps for my life. A story was written about me within the life I was living. I am the protagonist in this children's story, and I am the protagonist in my own life story. I embody the hero in the hero's journey. Goldstein's (2005) research recognized the challenge preservice teachers had identifying themselves as heroes. Her participants "loved the hero's journey but did not love the idea of being a hero" (Goldstein, p. 21). She found that "the commonplace hero-imagery of western culture was hegemonic and difficult to overcome" (Goldstein, p. 21). Put more succinctly, Goldstein's female participants associated the term hero with male action heroes and had difficulty letting go of that image. They simply did not see themselves as heroes because they were not male. Women have mostly lived in the shadow of male heroes. I did not experience this commonplace hero-imagery. Perhaps this was from participating in athletics my whole life, often with males as my fellow teammates and as my competitors. Often I was a better athlete than my male counterparts and therefore did not live in the shadow of male heroes. Or perhaps it was from losing my father to cancer at 2 years of age; therefore I was not brought up in such a way that I felt gender inequality. One thing is for certain, I did not live in the shadow of a male figure. According to Noble (2002), "because the stories of female heroes are rarely told, women seldom perceive their own lives as heroic journeys" (p. 30). Unbeknownst to me at the time, in my eyes I had already become a hero in my own story written by my

mom at 5 years of age and I was becoming an athletic hero of sorts participating on common ground with males my own age.

As I mentioned earlier I reread this story over and over again throughout the many stages of my life. It had a profound impact on the way I viewed myself. Noble (2002) defines heroes as people that are “fully human beings who are forged in the crucible of change, a process fraught with uncertainty, pain, and despair, and demanding heroic responses to life events” (p. 30). She goes on to suggest that these experiences can “transform a woman into a hero if she can see her life from that perspective” (p. 30). I have always seen my life from that perspective. I have always been a hero in my own eyes. I am doggedly persistent and determined to overcome any obstacles in my way. I own my own power. “Women often reject the idea of power because we equate it with patriarchal values of domination, exploitation, and control, which have held sway for too many years” (Noble, p. 201). I have been described as cocksure, smug, aggressive, assertive, and intense, and I often wonder if I were a man if these particular adjectives would be used to describe me. I agree with Noble when she suggests that power means the ability to see ourselves clearly, to trust our instincts, and to be the best we can be. Being the best I can be often requires me to focus my energy and become compartmentalized, which is reflected in Noble’s vision of a hero who “is somebody who makes it through whatever she must go through, who completes her search to the point where she can truly say, ‘I feel okay and there is more to do’” (Noble, p. 202). This is how believe I have managed to achieve the limited success I have managed to achieve thus far in my life. From being authentic and doing the best I can do in any given moment. I am not trying to achieve perfection but rather say to myself, okay I have done the best I can do at this moment in time, all the while knowing that there are many other gates for me to walk through in my quest to become self-actualized.

Two further themes emerged from this seminal story, my love of Nature and my exposure and immersion with experiential learning. As I write this I am aware for the first time that Nature and experiential learning are inextricably

intertwined for me and cannot be separated. My love of nature began, through experiential moments such as my morning walks with my Mom in Coronation Park while taking an active role in the performances that surrounded me.

According to Plotkin (2008), “long walks in nature provide some of the best parent-child interactions during middle childhood. Let the child set the pace and stop when she stops. Wander and wonder together, admire and explore” (p. 125). She did just that. From admiring the dancing seaweed, skipping stones on Lake Ontario’s flat surface, sitting under the shade of an expansive willow tree, to finding and naming my walking stick which was “bent like a bow by nature,” all these performances were moments I came to appreciate while being in Nature. By Nature I mean the nature of water, rocks, forests, and sun rises to name a few. Given the chance, I explored these forms and forces of nature. Through my interactions with nature I was “granted the widest and deepest trove of resources with which to flesh out a self” (Plotkin, p. 122). I found places to be quiet and relished those moments of solitude. It is difficult for me to explain the influence that being in Nature has had on me since it is an essence. Words cannot express fully what and how I feel when I am immersed in the outdoors. Perhaps the complexity of Nature is in her simplicity, for I do not need anything other than to be there. One thing is for certain, I have a great respect for all things natural and perhaps my Mom’s “soulcentric approach to child development” allowed me to “grow into [a] soul-rooted (initated) adult” (Plotkin, p. 119).

Gardner’s (1999) additional intelligence subsequent to his original seven is Naturalistic intelligence. Children possessing this type of intelligence may have a strong affinity to the outside world or to animals. This intelligence deals with sensing patterns and making connections to elements in nature, all attributes that I possessed as a young child and continue to possess today. According to Martin and Thomas (2000), a “rich bank of memories and experiences outdoors which people gather over time creates an emotional linkage, so that their sense of self becomes intertwined with that place” (p. 43). I believe this is what has happened to me over the span of my lifetime. As I



became more competent in the outdoors, I began to seek out more remote and extreme experiences (Martin & Thomas). Responding to Nature's whispers in the early morning enticing me towards Lookout Point to enjoy an early morning sunrise was an initial interaction with Nature I looked forward to. Eventually, it became a part of my morning ritual and took on a deeper more personally meaningful exchange. Embarking on a Vision Quest in the Manti La Sal Forest, Utah, requiring 13 days of ceremonies and culminating in a 4-day solo fast experience, forced me to "risk greater self-disclosure and increased vulnerability with nature" (Martin & Thomas, p. 43). I am drawn into Nature's beauty and her challenges. As my relationship with nature deepens I am left wondering how I fit into her patterns. What part am I being groomed to play?

Nature's patterns continue to teach me, and with intention I bring what I learn into my teaching practice and my life in unique ways. "Human-nature relationships can be a store for us to record our identities" (Martin & Thomas, 2000, p. 44). As I observe the patterns and cycles of nature I am continually learning how to live fully and completely in the moment. My interactions with nature "affirm who [I] am and acts as a rich storehouse of memories that help [me] to understand [my] sense of self" (Martin & Thomas, p. 44). I have learned how to live in the natural rhythm of Nature's beauty. Life has become simpler to navigate as I move in Her dance with grace and gratitude. I agree with Martin and Thomas when they conclude, "human-nature relationships may have the ability to define who we are as powerfully as interpersonal relationships do" (p. 44). When I tune into Nature's behaviours, moods, and nuances, an "emergent we" (Martin & Thomas, p. 44) becomes apparent in a space where language may fail to capture and express the depth of the intimate encounter with Her. The essence of the experience lingers with me indefinitely springing to the surface when I require her guidance in not only my teaching practice but my life outside of teaching as well. Simply, Nature has helped me to define who I am.

As I read through this story I can sense the significant role that experiential learning has played in my life and its importance for me as a

learner. Above and beyond our walks in a natural setting, Mom and Mary spoke to me as a young adult my entire life. The language they used with me was never watered down, but rather my intelligence was respected and enhanced as a result of this type of dialogue. My Mom used similes and metaphors to explain things to me from a very young age, but she used them in *context* and not in an artificial way. I was learning through an experience rather than about an experience. I was exposed to experiential learning from a very young age. Two examples from the narrative are “bent like a bow by nature” and the abstract concept of the *spectrum*. Both examples were discussed earlier.

A further example where my Mom elevated my thinking was around the metaphor *Waiting for Godot*, the title of a Samuel Beckett play. Starting at a young age I was told we were “Waiting for Godot.” What did that mean? I used to ponder this in my young mind. But I implicitly knew that I didn’t need to “come up” with a definitive answer, since that would defeat the purpose of the process. The very fact that I knew that I was waiting for something was enough. I am still waiting. It is the very thing that keeps me alert and sensitive to the people and events that surround me. In my interpretation I hope I never meet Godot and that I keep myself open to the endless possibilities that await me. It is the same underlying feeling I suggested earlier: I feel okay but there is more to do (Noble, 2002).

The final theme that emerged is that, for my family, intelligence is not measured by a number but rather by the depth and breadth of a response to a big question. In the same vein as Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) in their seminal work *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, Mom and Mary emphasized connected learning over learning in isolation, understanding and acceptance over assessment, they adhered to flexible timelines allowing knowledge to emerge, and they encouraged me to evolve following my own path and my own rhythm. I am thankful that I had two wise educators that understood a child’s development as something more than a number or a ranking. Two women who fully understood educational theories and knew how to put them into practice

and nurture me as a learner with great care, respect, trust, and integrity. They embodied the Ontario College of Teachers Ethical Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession (2006). Moreover they understood how I learned, or put another way, how I needed to receive information. I needed to build on the knowledge I had been immersed in experientially in my home environment and integrate it with the knowledge I learned at school and then apply it in a new situation for deep learning to occur.

Mom and Mary understood that my school report card marks did not adequately reflect my full potential as a learner. It is too bad I did not believe this throughout my career as a student but rather believed that my grades were a direct reflection of my intelligence. I was inculcated into a system that reveres grades as a measure of intelligence. It is interesting that in spite of Mom's and Mary's best effort I still believed the grading system. I think this was because society as a whole put so much emphasis on achievement in the form of a number grade. However, even though it took me many years to understand my learning profile, and I cannot emphasize this enough, without the daily encouragement from my Mom and Mary, which helped build my self-concept and self-esteem, I cannot imagine where I would be today. How does knowing this improve my teaching and learning practice? I had been teaching about 5 or 6 years when I began to reflect on this story. So many of my students wanted to achieve high marks at the expense of deep learning, so I tended to counter their way of being by emphasizing process, effort, and growth rather than product, competition, and achievement. Today I work towards bringing an awareness of the many ways intelligence can be recognized, harnessed, and fostered and try hard to balance my teaching and learning approach to meet the intellectual needs of as many students as possible.

#### **Narrative 4—Nuclear Family**

The Conch Shell restaurant overlooks the horseshoe-shaped harbour in St. George's, the capital of the spice island of the Caribbean, Grenada. Its traditional red-tiled roof dots the urban landscape of shops and homes nestled

neatly between the pastel rainbow coloured dockside warehouses. We had just arrived in Grenada early that afternoon for our March Break holiday and I am eager to eat. As we approach the hostess, my Mom lets her know that there will be three of us for dinner. We are politely ushered to a table with an idyllic window view of the harbour and Grand Anse Beach. I quickly pour over the menu and decide what I am going to have and then turn my attention to the harbour and the interesting architecture that makes its way through the capital city. I am struck by the pale, soft colours used to enhance the outside of the buildings. It is unique. I have never visited a place in my 15 years that has used this palette to accentuate a city's ambiance. I wonder how this palette was determined.

A dark-skinned waiter arrives at our table dressed in a crisp white jacket, black pleated pants, and polished black shoes. He has a towel draped on one arm and a tray in the other. "Good evening ladies, my name is Maurice and I will be looking after you this evening. Can I offer you something to drink, perhaps a Lime Squash or a Planter's Punch?"

"Good evening Maurice," Mom replies, "I would like a Planter's Punch. How about you Mary?"

"I would like to try the Lime Squash please."

"And you Hilary?" Mom asks.

"I would like a virgin Planter's Punch please," I say using my best manners.

“One virgin Planter’s Punch for the young lady coming right up.” And off he went heading towards the bar.

“What a view!” Mom exclaimed, “it is picture perfect.”

As we peruse the menu, another family arrives. As they take their seats, not too far from us, we continue to discuss all the different foods, deciphering what the equivalent foods would be back in Canada. Some of the items are easy to figure out such as Crab and Callaloo, Pepper Pot, Pig souse, and Roti. Others require a bit more research, for example Lambie souse is conch and Manicou is possum. I can’t imagine eating possum. But when I think back to our trip to Jamaica, I ate goat on a spit and it was delicious, so maybe, just maybe Manicou would be good as well. I don’t know what to have.

In no time, Maurice is back with our fancy drinks. Mine comes complete with a garnish made up of a cherry and an orange slice both skewered to an umbrella that juts out the top of the hourglass-figured stemware. Mom’s and Mary’s drinks are colourful as well, with the same garnish. I hope they won’t want their orange and cherry.

“Thanks Maurice.”

“I will be back to take your order in a few minutes,” he stated and headed towards the family sitting to our left, a mother, father, and two kids, a boy and a girl. I could see from where I was sitting that he was taking their drink order. I wonder if the kids will get virgin drinks too.

Once we finally decide on our meals Maurice returns to take our order. Mom and Mary both order the roti and I order the Crab and Callaloo. “Good

choice young lady,” Maurice assures me. Once Maurice takes his leave Mom starts to share her observations.

“Hilary, see that family over there?” she queries.

“Yes,” I reply.

“They are a *nuclear family*,” she shares, “they consist of a mother, father, son, and daughter.” Mom always comes up with this far-out terminology. *Nuclear family*, I can see what she was getting at. At the center of the family are a mother and father and two children, a boy and a girl. I know exactly what she is trying to explain to me. “Boy she is smart,” I thought to myself, “*Nuclear family*, I wonder how she thinks up these things. This is a perfect description for that family. They are very nuclear.”

Maurice brings me a bib, some claws to crack open the crab, a small fork to dig the crab out of its shell, and a melted butter set-up. He then drops off a bunch of napkins. He must really think I am going to make a mess. About 10 minutes later the food arrives. Mom’s and Mary’s roti looks scrumptious. I am so hungry I can hardly contain myself. I dig into the crab and callaloo with enthusiasm and start the whole tedious process of cracking the crab’s shell, digging out the meat, and dipping it in the hot butter. This is going to take me awhile, but it is well worth the wait.

#### *Four Years Later*

I find myself sitting in the back row of my evening Sociology class at the University of Toronto. It is an elective course. Dr. Peters is conducting a lecture on the family unit and its complexity. His presentation highlights

changes to the family formation. He begins by using the traditional definition of nuclear family. It is very much like my Mom's definition. And then it dawns on me; *hey wait a minute, my Mom didn't make up the definition for nuclear family.* I thought she had cleverly originated the term nuclear family and its definition the night we ate dinner at The Conch Shell restaurant, and now in this moment I realize she didn't.

Right after class I call my Mom. "Mom, tonight in my Sociology class, Dr. Peters told us all about the nuclear family and how it is changing. I thought you made that term up, Mom, when you explained to me what a nuclear family was when we were in Grenada and you pointed to that family having dinner beside us."

"Don't be silly, Hilary I never said I made it up; I was just showing you what a nuclear family looked like," she insisted. I wonder what was she trying to tell me?

#### *Hermeneutic Interlude*

This story is mostly about a truth not explicitly spoken, which is the fact that my family is *not* a nuclear family. But in the story I am told, "*They are a nuclear family.*" The theme of this narrative, as I interpret it, is family and its diverse nature, and underlying that theme is sexual orientation and gender issues. I grew up in a nontraditional family but did not really have a full sense of that until I was in my mid-20s when a friend of mine shared a story with me. She told me that the first time she came to my house (when she was 19 years of age) I was showing her around and, as we passed the master bedroom, I said, "This is Mom and Mary's room," and then continued on down the hall towards my room and my brother's room. Evidently what surprised her was my nonchalant way of stating that fact. Here I was openly telling her that that was

Mom and Mary's bedroom without being embarrassed, shy, or hiding that fact because for me it was a nonissue since it was Mom and Mary's bedroom. It was not until she shared that story with me that I came to the realization that people may not have found my upbringing morally or socially acceptable (Lang & Evans, 2006). But before my friend shared her story I was ignorant of just how unusual my upbringing was. This could be because of the story I was neatly sewn into.

I have two mothers. Today it is not so unusual or unique to have two mothers or two fathers, basically two sets of parents if you come from a family that has undergone a divorce and then a reconfiguration through remarriage. But I have two mothers who are in a partnership, and that is different. The story that I was sewn into growing up was that Mary was my God Mother since I was baptized Roman Catholic but never made my First Communion. We stopped going to church when I reached the age of 5. But this is how I introduced her growing up: as my God Mother. As a child of a "single parent" (my father died when I was 2 years of age) I was consoled by the fact that if anything should happen to my Mom, Mary was my legal guardian and that she would look after me. This is all true but not the whole story. I can only share an interpretation of my story growing up with two women as my parents.

Circling back on the story *Nuclear Family*, I wonder why I chose to write this particular story? How has the role of the family unit played out in my life? How has my exposure to experiential learning influenced me? Last, how does "living" this story seep into my teaching practice?

I may have chosen to write this story because I was implicitly aware of the impact my upbringing has had on my teaching practice. I believe that I do not carry the biases some teachers carry with regards to diversity. When I talk about diversity with regards to teaching and learning I am referring to learning styles and modalities, brain research, special needs, poverty, human rights, antiracism, culture, and gender differences (Lang & Evans, 2006). All of these topics fall under the broad heading of diversity, but this story specifically relates to my openness towards sexual orientation, which I have directly



experienced through my upbringing. This is an example of ontological diversity, the way I am being in the world is a result of my upbringing. According to Beeman and Blenkinsop (2008) “certain ways of being,” specifically *attentive receptivity*, “are also linked to a variety of knowledges” (p. 96). Attentive receptivity is “a ‘state of being’ and not merely an alternative emotional or intellectual expression, because it is achieved only in the context of a certain life lived” (p. 99). From this way of being my epistemological approach to diversity in the classroom emerged. Beeman and Blenkinsop call this “*meander knowing*” (p. 99), which is “the epistemological accompaniment—to the ontological state of attentive receptivity. I do not assume all students in my class are heterosexual. Acknowledging the presence of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transsexual students and how to deal with differences in sexual orientation remains a controversial issue for some teachers, but not for me. Often heterosexist thinking prevents students from even considering that a “gay” student might be in their class.

My ontology and my *attentive receptivity* surrounding diversity allows me to feel confident and relaxed about discussing these issues and addressing the language I (we) use in the classroom as to not alienate students who may have a different sexual orientation. My epistemology, or *meander knowing* around diversity mirrors my ontology. Both are so closely intertwined it is difficult to know where one ends and the other begins—if indeed they are separate. Therefore, I feel my job is to I talk openly and honestly about sexual orientation and gender differences. I believe my upbringing has greatly influenced how I approach my teaching and learning environment. The question for me remains, can this openness towards sexual orientation and gender differences be taught, or has my personal query arisen solely out of my lived experiences? Do other teachers ask these same types of ontological and epistemological questions?

My parents, both teachers, guided my learning by providing experiential opportunities. These experiences have had a profound impact on my own teaching practice and shaped how I approach many of the learning

opportunities I provide for my students. For example, learning about the concept of nuclear family was not preplanned; it happened in an authentic way, much like many of my learning opportunities. I learn best through lived experience, and this authentic learning opportunity fostered way of knowing. Maybe this is why I use as many experiential learning opportunities as I possibly can in the classroom, knowing that many students, not all learn best when this approach is employed.

Last, living this story while researching the self has brought to the surface how my lived experiences have shaped, reshaped, and impacted my teaching practice. It has made me aware of the profound influence my family has had on my philosophy of education and my growth as a teacher. Sharing my story with beginning teachers may perhaps allow them to reflect on their lived experiences and examine the influences they have had and how those experiences have shaped or had some bearing on how they approach their teaching and learning practice.

#### **Narrative 5—Challenge and Service: A Speech for Canada Cord Recipients**

*“Commitment to teaching well is a commitment to service. Teachers who do the best work are always willing to serve the needs of their students” (hooks, 2003, p. 83).*

#### *Criteria*

It is indeed an honour to participate in this ceremony, and more important to bear witness to the accomplishments of these fine young women. When I inquired into the kinds of tasks these ladies had to accomplish to be awarded the Canada Cord I was sent a spreadsheet documenting all their opportunities for challenge and service. Under the direction of: Be Prepared, Camping, Community, Home, Leadership, Outdoor, and the World the tasks were laid out before these young women. You have all spent hundreds of hours earning each one of these emblems, and all of these experiences together, I

believe, will assist each one of you in the years to come for you have begun to build your foundation.

### *The Metaphor*

Symbols express and represent meaning, and meaning helps provide purpose and understanding in our lives. This is why I use the symbol or metaphor of an Inukshuk to represent one's life. Each rock represents an event, a new learning, an experience, a challenge, a goal attained, and/or a dream realized in one's journey. From learning how to plan, prepare, and execute an outdoor camping expedition at the Bronze, Silver, and Gold level to learning about First Aid for the home. The rocks you have earned through the Guiding experiences have been placed, and your foundation is settling and becoming strong and stable.

Every person's foundation is set in a different way. My foundation was built first and foremost from the love, care, and commitment of my family. From about the age of 8 onwards, participation in sport was where my foundation was set. Through playing sports I learned about preparation and practice, commitment, teamwork, fair play, and I developed leadership skills through the various roles I played in both individual and team sports. This is where I believe I developed a love of keeping active and being physically fit which has become an integral part of my adult life. These are the rocks that became the foundation and the cornerstone of my life.

Once you start placing your stones, well ladies, the sky is the limit. You can achieve anything you set your mind to. And even when adversity

abounds, the teachings and lived experiences you have already experienced and will continue to experience and learn from will serve you well throughout your entire life.

### *Press On*

At 19, I notified my Mom that I wanted to compete in the Ironman triathlon. At that time the sport of triathlon was in its infancy, only 3 years old so I had to explain to her what it entailed: 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike ride, and then a 24.2-mile run. Well there was absolutely no hesitation in her response. She told me she would not only morally support me but that she would financially support me as well so that I could train fulltime while I worked towards achieving my goal. She told me, and I will never forget this, that she knew I could finish it. She believed in me. What more could I ask for?

My Mom witnessed my persistent, “press on” kind of attitude on a daily basis in every aspect of my life. One example that comes to mind is my struggles with mathematics. I continued to take math right through grade 13, even when teachers and guidance counselors advised me to drop it because it was my weakest subject. They felt it would reduce my chances of getting into university. But I didn’t listen to their advice and instead I carried on until, in the end, I passed the course. Somewhere deep inside me I knew that completing the course was more important than the final grade. I knew that what I was learning through persistent effort was what was important. Not giving in to my teachers’ pleas but instead following through with what I set out to accomplish, is what was, and what is important to me today.

While preparing this speech I revisited an article I wrote for a Canadian Women's Study Journal in 1983 after I finished my first Ironman in Hawaii. I hadn't read this article in over 20 years. I was amused when I came across this passage:

I have never done a marathon but I am as confident as someone who has run 10 marathons. I can do it. I know I have the endurance and the mental capacities that are required to complete it. The marathon has been considered the yardstick to my finishing the triathlon by so many people. "You haven't completed a marathon and you think you can finish the triathlon?" How many times have I heard that statement from fitness experts, sportscasters, sport reporters, runners, and my friends on campus? But I know myself and I know what I can do, and that is my yardstick. I stick to it. As long as my energy stores stand up there will be no problem! (Matte, 1983, p. 25)

As you can hear in my voice, I knew what I was capable of achieving, regardless of what everyone else thought. Where did my determination come from?

For me it is the process and not the final product that drives what I do, and this has served me well throughout my life. From earning my grade 13 math credit to completing three Ironman triathlons, to completing the 23 stages of the first Women's Tour de France, to carrying out a 4-day solo fast with 3 gallons of water and a sleeping bag on the edge of Arch Canyon in Utah for my Vision Quest, to my latest trek, a 77 km hike along the Pacific Rim Coast Trail,

the process I committed to was the same: persevere, press on, do not give up unless safety becomes a factor, and listen to your gut instinct. The rocks that I earned from those experiences (and many others) and carefully placed while building my Inukshuk have allowed me to have a clear vision of what I am capable of long before I attempt each challenge. The sky is the limit.

### *Rebuilding*

The beauty of the Inukshuk as a metaphor representing life's accomplishments is that at any time it can fall over, and this gives you and me the chance to rebuild it, but this time even stronger. It doesn't mean the previous experiences disappear or dissolve away; in fact we get to reorganize them and use them in a new way. Each time I rebuild my Inukshuk it is different; it has to be because I have had new experiences to add to my foundation.

I believe that in all of life's adversities there is a silver lining. In 1983, competing in my second Ironman, the winds on the bike were upwards of 80 km per hour and I ended up badly dehydrating. I don't know how I managed to finish the marathon portion of the triathlon. It took me over 5½ hours to complete the run, when the previous year I ran it in well under 4 hours. I was immediately taken in to the medical tent and placed on intravenous in order to replenish my fluids. My Inukshuk had toppled over. My goal of beating my previous year's time and the hope of placing in the top 10 were defeated, but within that experience something extraordinary happened. The previous year, in 1982, at about mile 7 of the run, I came across a German fellow I had met

during my 2-week acclimatization period prior to the race. He was walking and looking a little defeated. I ran up beside him, grabbed his arm, and encouraged him to press on. We ran together for a short time and then I ran on. He finished the race. When we met the next day at the celebration ceremony he thanked me for my encouragement, telling me that he had been contemplating dropping out and that if I hadn't happened upon him and encouraged him at that particular moment in time he didn't think he would have finished the race. Fast forward to 1983. There I am walking, contemplating dropping out when out of the blue a hand grabs my elbow and I hear a voice with a German accent encouraging me and spurring me on. It was the same fellow from the previous year. He ran with me a short time before running on. I finished the race too. In the Optimist's Creed one of the tenets reads, "Be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own," and that is what I experienced. When I rebuilt my Inukshuk after the 1982 and '83 triathlons my foundation was stronger in the knowledge that being of service to others was as important as the competition itself.

### *Goal Setting*

Challenge and service: When I reflect back on my lived experiences I can see that I have always enjoyed being challenged or having a goal to work towards, and I still do today. The process of achieving goals that I have set for myself is what brings meaning to my life, setbacks are good and have always allowed me to rebuild and become stronger and more stable, and being of service to others in any capacity is worthwhile and brings me joy. Whether I

am a caregiver for my mom, encouraging a fellow athlete, or being of service as a teacher, all these experiences play a part in who I am as a contributing member of society.

### *Take Action*

Your life is before you. You have at your disposal all the tools you need to accomplish any goal you set your mind to. Your foundation is solid. All you need to do now is let your imagination dream big. Then take on that challenge, whatever it is for you. Work towards it, remembering to enjoy, embrace, and learn from the process along the way. Always remember to be of service to those around you who may or may not be less fortunate than yourself, but who need your guidance, your expertise, your compassion, and your empathy. And you will feel joy in the knowledge that you are now a vital contributing member of a community and that your ability to meet challenges and be of service to others are the foundational stones of any healthy and vibrant society. Ladies, I congratulate you on earning the Canada Cord and wish you well on your journey through life.

### *Hermeneutic Interlude*

Regardless of the venue I am invited to speak at, the characteristics that I believe make up who I am as a teacher and learner in and out of the classroom often come through my underlying message. Having a personal metaphor, building a strong foundation, making mistakes (or experiencing setbacks), rebuilding one's foundation, the importance of family, being of service to others, creating challenges or goal setting, process over product, a press-on attitude, and being positive are some of the qualities I recognize as important and try to uphold when possible. As I have ventured through the



process of interpreting each narrative in this reflective experience of making meaning of my teacher-self, I have begun to realize the significance that the role of metaphor has played out in my life.

Metaphors are powerful guides that can offer insight and can direct future actions (Weinrauch, 2005). The Inukshuk is a man-made stone landmark used by the Inuit for navigation, food cache, and point of reference to name a few. The mystery that accompanies the Inukshuk, an ancient symbol cannot go unrecognized (see Hallendy, 2000). Since I started teaching the Inukshuk emerged as a marker for my life as a teacher or maybe it emerged as a metaphor representing my deep connection and respect for nature. Having the Inukshuk as my personal metaphor allowed me to express the importance and meaning I placed on this symbol in relation to other experiences (Weinrauch). In this narrative, I used the Inukshuk to illustrate life's setbacks. When I faced setbacks in my life, metaphorically my Inukshuk toppled over. As I began to replace the stones I attempted to rebuild it with an even stronger foundation than before with an end result that hopefully brings new meaning into my life. At least that is my goal each time. In reality the process of rebuilding my Inukshuk has more often than not taken numerous attempts to rebuild. Many times I was not ready to receive the necessary information in order to restructure my foundation to create a stronger base. I can be a stubborn participant in the learning process.

Using metaphors is an integral part of my personal practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1986). Personal practical knowledge describes a teacher's "particular way of reconstructing the past and intentions for the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 25). Again, using the Inukshuk I was able to guide my audience to a new way of viewing failure by illustrating how the past could be reconstructed in the present while building towards a new beginning through the reconstruction of building an Inukshuk. The focus was not on the metaphor's content but on the process of its change (Hovelynck, 1998). Therefore, my personal practical knowledge, or embodied knowledge, allows me to understand my teaching acts

in terms of personalized experiences such as the one in the narrative, presenting a speech to the recipients of the Canada Cord. In addition, I can use this process of writing narratives and then interpreting them to unveil the deeper meaning as a means of professional development on my way to improving my teaching and learning practice.

Another layer in the interpretive procedure is that I have always been a process-driven person, thriving on the minutiae when immersed within the challenges I set for myself. I have always enjoyed accomplishing small goals like navigating a series of stepping-stones on my way to the culminating task. When I was growing up I was not cognizant of the fact that that I was a process person. I could not attach a label or name the teaching approach that I now know best suited my needs. Today, as a teacher educator, I realize that the process-oriented classroom is one that promotes thinking as opposed to regurgitation of facts. It puts the child at the center of the teaching and learning process (Lang & Evans, 2006). As outlined by Lang and Evans when comparing product versus process classrooms, in a process-driven classroom: teachers emphasize how a student accomplished a task rather than what the student did, the means of finding an answer is as important as the answer, the teacher evaluates the process, the student reflects on his/her thinking and has a growing awareness of how s/he learns and can learn, and learning occurs when students work through a process in which knowledge is manipulated and restructured to reach insight.

In a process-driven classroom formative assessment, which is “assessment that occurs during the learning process, and provides feedback to both students and teachers to help improve learning” (Cooper, 2007. p. 11) is adhered to. It occurs during the assessment for learning phase when students receive timely quality feedback so that they can move students along the developmental continuum. I wonder if I would have had a more successful overall learning experience from grade 7 through grade 13 if the undervalued characteristics of process learning and formative assessment had been adhered to? I am not suggesting that only process should be emphasized in a teaching

and learning space, but this type of learning environment was underrepresented in most of the classrooms I inhabited. However, I cannot change the lived experiences I have undergone, nor do I want to, since the effort I sustained as a learner implicitly taught me lessons that I have embodied but that have only recently explicitly surfaced.

Since I struggled academically from grade 7 onwards I had to work hard in order to achieve grades in the 70s. Even with sustained effort I often earned a mark in the 60s. I do not think I ever fully accepted my mediocre academic standing. For the most part I felt unintelligent, always being judged by the grades on my report card. What I did not realize until the past 2 years was that this perceived mediocre achievement freed me from the constraints that some people experience when pressured to achieve and maintain a high academic standing. Put another way, I am not afraid to take risks and I am not afraid of failure; therefore, when I make mistakes, I learn from the experience and readily bounce back with my self-esteem fully intact. I never feel like I have failed. I acknowledge that I have made an attempt and put forth effort. I always search for that little *something* that I learned from the experience, as I previously mentioned when I described the rebuilding of my Inukshuk, and then, when appropriate, I transfer what I have learned to another situation. At the time, struggling to achieve higher marks in junior high and high school may have seemed insurmountable, but what that struggle did for me was provide a foundation that freed me to take risks and try new things. The lessons I learned from that experience opened the door for me to become involved in so many wonderful activities in all areas of my life without the fear of failure holding me back.

According to Wilcox, Watson, and Paterson (2004), “those of us who notice may begin to wonder, and then, return to noticing in order to determine patterns for further wondering and consideration” (p. 281). I am a person who notices things and then begins to wonder. I have been teaching in the Faculty of Education for 2 years, and what I have noticed is that many of the beginning teachers I have instructed did not struggle academically like I did and many

never experienced academic failure. Academic failure is perceived differently for each person. Traditionally in an educational setting a grade under 50% is considered a failure. What I am suggesting by using the term academic failure is not when a person earns a mark below 50% but rather when a person does not reach the personal benchmark one strives towards in order to attain the level of achievement that is necessary for him/her to feel successful. For many of the beginning teachers I instructed, earning a grade in the 70s would be considered academic failure since for the most part the majority of the beginning teachers were high achievers that maintained a high average to gain entrance into the Teacher Education program. I was taken aback by this revelation, since earning a grade in the 70s for me would have reflected academic success, not failure.

Striving for high grades at the expense of deep learning has had an effect on how students engaged with learning opportunities presented to them. What I have noticed over the past 2 years that I have been teaching at the Faculty of Education is that when beginning teachers were exposed to an innovative teaching strategy, such as experiential or problem-based learning, many were excited about its potential for creating an atmosphere for student success, but at the same time I noticed that they were reluctant to try it out in a classroom setting. Two things emerged from this wondering, then noticing (Wilcox et al., 2004). First, the beginning teachers were afraid that they might not be completely successful in implementing the strategy and therefore were not willing to take a risk. Second, if they were not successful their Teacher Advisor might award them a low grade for their teaching practicum. I noticed that they put so much emphasis on their own achievement as a student that at times this constrained their learning as a beginning teacher. This is a pattern that I need to address as I venture into my third year as a Foundational Methods instructor. Now that I have become aware of this issue through my wondering and noticing (Wilcox et al., 2004) how do I use this knowledge to improve my teaching and learning practice? How can I effectively facilitate a beginning teacher's transition from student to professional in such a way that they start to deconstruct their own assumptions about the teaching and learning process?

While learning the craft of teaching, I noted that many beginning teachers fear earning a low grade in their teaching practicum. I have also noticed that they fear moving outside the standardization-teaching box in an active attempt to implement an innovative teaching strategy. This may reflect why the Faculty of Teacher Education produces so many traditional teachers who predominantly use a direct teaching approach. As Ayers (2004) states, “good teaching is not automatic; it is always a struggle. It is filled with initiative and risk, but also with satisfaction and joy. It is intricate, complex, deep, and wide. It is never twice the same” (p. 43). The very educational system they are now immersed in as a beginning teacher has trained them to view the world as a competition. This competitive system they have been initiated into their whole educational career has trained them to adhere to the status quo and compete with their fellow students through the attainment of high grades. They have learned how to play the game of learning by finding out what a teacher wants and then regurgitating that information right back to them. “What we call education is usually no more than training” (Ayers, p. 58). My personal mandate is clear. Create an atmosphere of disrupting the status quo and guide beginning teachers to approach their teaching and learning environment holistically, placing their students at the center and meeting all their needs: mind, body, and spirit. According to Ayers the questions we need to focus on are these: “Who is this person before me? What are his interests and areas of wonder? How does she express herself, and what is her awareness of herself as a learner? What efforts and potential does she bring?” (p. 57). When the emotional and spiritual capacities of children take precedence over the curriculum, the attainment of grades will follow (Kohn, 1999). Perhaps if a teacher, at any point in his/her career, approaches his/her own practice attending to his/her emotional and spiritual needs first, then his/her teaching practice will be enhanced and thus more enriched.

When I ask beginning teachers to reflect on the teachers that had an impact on their lives, often they mention the teachers that attended to their emotional well-being. They know firsthand that teaching the whole child is an

effective way to reach most children. So why don't more teachers approach their teaching and learning space with the goal of reaching the whole child as their mandate? Most beginning teachers resist the challenge to teach this way since it goes against the present-day educational climate of standardization. They do not want to rock the boat. They want to float with the status quo, and they will offer the system what it wants in order to be successful at landing a teaching position. It is a cycle that perpetuates a traditional teaching model.

Since many of my teacher education students have not been in a position where they needed to challenge the standardized educational system since they achieved academic success in this system, they do not carry the same biases that I do. Many of my students have never experienced academic failure. When I describe what I call "a freeing feeling to fail" it is foreign to them. When I attempt a new challenge I am not afraid of failure; I am free to fail. I truly believe I adopted this attitude due to my experience as a mediocre student and the embodied notion that I was always performing below the standard for my developmental age. Thus it felt like I was always failing to fit into society's standards of academic success. How does becoming aware of this improve my practice?

Having the opportunity to allow this self-knowledge to emerge through this interpretive process gives me the opportunity to deepen my understanding of the other, the student who can memorize and regurgitate and attain academic success in this type of academic system. Not all learners learn in the same way or have the same motivation towards learning. I can share my story and the struggles I underwent as a student, and they can share their stories. Together we can reflect upon the students who participate in our classrooms; some will have a learning profile like mine, and some students will have a learning profile like theirs. Together, when we look upon each other's lived experiences with a critical eye, we can unveil moments from our lives that define who we are as teachers/learners and learn how to navigate what the best teaching practice for all learners could be.

With my guidance the students I work with at any level learn and sometimes relearn how to take risks, learn how to make mistakes, so they too can experience what it is like to learn from “failure” with their self-esteem intact. I have attempted all kinds of teaching strategies and was unsuccessful in my implementation countless times, but I never felt I failed my students or myself because there is no failure in trying. I really think this attitude is rooted in my endless struggles to achieve academic success, or was it rooted in my natural demeanour of being an optimist?

Optimism is a theme that runs through my life story. I am the eternal optimist; I see the glass as “half full.” This disposition has served me well when working with students, for I truly believe everyone can succeed. Being positive, looking out for the well-being of others, and putting another’s needs first is a healthy philosophy to embody when one chooses the career path of a teacher. Now that I am in a position of working with beginning teachers at the Faculty of Education, I find it challenging to work with beginning teachers who see the world through the “glass is half empty” lens and who believe that not everyone can succeed. I wonder if it easier to uphold the Ethical Standards of Practice of integrity, trust, respect, and care if one is an optimist? I also challenge my students around my ideals about a more inclusive, collaborative community versus a competitive, mark-driven society. Many of the beginning teachers believe that it is healthy for students to be educated in a competitive system where there are winners and losers, and I continually force them to examine their assumptions about the teaching and learning process. This often becomes a heated discussion with many students. My intensity with regards to these two discussion points, optimism versus pessimism and collaboration versus competition can end up being a trying experience for some beginning teachers. My determined manner with regards to my beliefs and values around teaching and learning might very well be viewed as one of my weaknesses as a teacher/learner.

I have come to believe that my role as a teacher educator is to emphasize the importance of process within the method of teaching and

learning. This may sound altruistic, but it is my hope that I can promote learning for the sake of wanting to learn and not for the sake of earning a high grade. Our beginning teachers are transitioning from the role of student into the role of a professional. They are well versed at playing the academic game and finding out what a teacher “wants” (and it is usually product driven) and then regurgitating that information back to the teacher so they can achieve a high grade. They often are not engaged in the process of learning but rather in the process of achieving a high grade for the sake of achieving a high grade. My role as a teacher educator is to promote deep, sustained learning, the type of learning that encourages a person to want to learn more.

#### **Narrative 6—Mr. Ellis**

*Holistic educators take very seriously the human love of beauty. The arts—graphic and performing—hold a central and exalted role in most holistic educational approaches. Imagination and creativity—the natural desire to give form to ideas and feelings—are highly respected and encouraged. (R. Miller, 2000, p. 24)*

*Devalued...*

“What you do in the classroom won’t matter to the kids. All they will remember will be extracurricular, the trips, the spirit days, and the teams they played on,” he insisted, “so don’t take what happens in your classroom so seriously.” Without a word, I turned around and walked away. A rebuttal wasn’t going to change my Principal’s mind. As long as our school was competitive and won pennants in cross country, volleyball, and basketball, then “we” were considered a successful school. I knew the importance of athletics and how they helped to shape who I am. But I also knew that it wasn’t to the exclusion of everything else that happened in school. I saved my energy for people who I knew would need it, the children in my classroom



*...But Not Disheartened*

As I slowly mounted the stairs to the second floor, I pondered how someone in his position, a leader in the school, could be so jaded about a child's academic learning. "I guess he has no idea how engaging learning could be," I thought to myself. I unlocked the door and entered my classroom. Colour sang out from every part of the room; hands-on models were scattered across the back counter, pieces of published writing were hung on the wall, kids' advertisements for imaginary products were displayed, symbolic reading projects were hanging on coat hangers from the ceiling. A celebration of imagination, creativity, and community was evident in every corner of the room. I was home.

I lowered myself to my chair and gazed out the window. I am fortunate to look out onto a slice of forest that was left over from the recent destruction that ripped through Burlington. The 407. This stand of trees has many indigenous species that grow in southern Ontario. It is unique, just like the students I teach. They all have distinct needs and requirements that need much attention in order for them to develop and grow into the people they are meant to become. They need to grow deep roots that will provide a solid foundation for present and future growth. These roots will provide a constant flow of nourishment to the rest of their body, mind, and spirit. Whether they are an oak, a shag-bark hickory, a birch, an elm, or a red maple. I must attempt to offer them what they need, their root requirements. Maybe it is an opportunity to design and build a kinesthetic product or present a dramatic

piece they've written, directed, and maybe even starred in? Maybe they will write music, perhaps anthems accompanied by lyrics for their country project, or design and create a flag for their country? Maybe poetry is their calling, or how about graphing and analyzing data for an upcoming fundraiser after initiating a school poll? The bell sounds, indicating the students' imminent arrival.

I awaken from my solitary reverie in time to gather my final thoughts. Choice, teaching holistically, and encouragement are the necessary requirements for deep root growth. We are part of this ecosystem together, striving for balance and interconnectedness. As the children start to trickle in, I take one more glance out the window. Autumn is upon us, and the vibrant colours of the leaves shimmer in the sunshine. I feel so fortunate to be a part of their root development.

"Hey, Mrs. Brown, what will we be doing this afternoon?" Sarah asks enthusiastically. I pondered for a moment.

"Let's go for a walk in the forest," I suggest. "Did you know that every indigenous species from southern Ontario resides in our forest?" My role is an important one, one that I believe will matter.

### *Hermeneutic Interlude*

This narrative illuminates many aspects of the teaching and learning process that I believe in and adhere to, but one theme that stands out for me is my determination. It illustrates that regardless of who is trying to control my teaching practice, even when it is the lead administrator of the school, if I believe in something I carry out my plans based on my own values and beliefs about how children learn. As Brookfield (2006) points out, the point of

teaching is to help students learn. I operate under this assumption. In order to do this well, “we [teachers] have to take informed pedagogical actions” (Brookfield, p. 24). I believe that I do this for the most part even if this unveils a determination and conviction that may be viewed by some as a negative trait.

When my principal tells me that it does not matter what I do in the classroom, I critically reflect upon the variety of learning activities that take place in my teaching and learning environment. I take into account that I use respectful tasks, flexible groupings, and ongoing formative assessment to ensure my students are valued academically as well as emotionally, socially, and spiritually. It is only after this critical reflection that I engage with students in a way that I feel is “contextually informed,” that is, I take action “based on assumptions that have been carefully and critically investigated” (Brookfield, p. 25).

Regardless of Mr. Ellis’ insistence that my teaching practice within the four walls of the classroom is not worth something to the children I teach, I take my class out for a walk in the woods. Conceivably, this is my Naturalistic intelligence (Gardner, 1999) coming through. Perhaps I take my students out into Nature because I am stubborn and want to hold onto my independence. Perhaps I take my students out into the woods because this will provide them with a context for their writing; the experience may enhance their senses and provide them with new avenues for expression when they are searching for that one adjective that will enrich their poetry writing. Or perhaps I take them out into the woods so that I can prove to Mr. Ellis that how I engage with my students does in fact mean something not only to them but to me as well. If this is why I take them out, then perhaps Mr. Ellis is correct and that the reason kids remember activities they participate in outside of the classroom is because they are experiential in nature. Is that not why I took my students out into the forest on a mini field trip?

According to Jickling (2009) when on a field trip “learning is quintessentially experiential in nature, that these experiences enable an important way of knowing, and that this knowing is deeply personal, emotional

in nature, and lies at the heart of our ability to be ethical beings” (p. 164). This is why I took them out into the woods so they could experience a deeply personal and emotional way of knowing. This is why they remember these experiences. Mr. Ellis was correct. Now I need to find a way to bring this type of learning to life in the classroom.

When I teach, I believe I embody a “critical imagination” (Denzin, 2003, p. 229). A critical imagination according to Denzin is hopeful of change with the underlying notion of improving human existence. Like many teachers I believe in teaching the whole child: mind, body, and spirit. I enjoy exploring experiential learning opportunities, allowing choice to flourish, using multiple intelligences, stimulating a child’s creativity and imagination as well as my own. I value this approach to teaching because I am hopeful that this approach differentiates instruction and therefore meets the needs of a diverse learning community. I agree with Denzin when he suggests that hope is ethical, moral, and that hope also gives meaning to the struggles to change the world. Freire (1992) states that “one of the tasks of the progressive educator...is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be” (p. 9). It is my hope that I can bring those experiential moments into the classroom because I do believe that what happens in the classroom does matter, and I hope it also matters to the children I work with. By taking my students for a walk in the woods I was exercising my critical imagination and unveiling opportunities for hope and Nature played a pivotal role in this unveiling. This reaffirms my motivation to bring this type of experiential learning opportunity into the classroom.

The wooded area just outside my classroom provided another way of knowing for me to explore with my students in this piece. I had a deep appreciation for the woodland I viewed from my classroom window. I knew how rare it was to be able to witness the life cycle of a forest as the seasons came and went. I often wondered if the teachers who taught in that classroom before me had the same appreciation for the view we were privileged to share. When I moved from that school, one of my “cons” for leaving was that I would

miss the daily view that stimulated my creativity and way of being. Nature, as an ontological need, demands a presence in my teaching and learning practice. I used to receive energy from the forest, its tranquil beauty, and the serenity it projected onto me. I used to think I was a bit strange, even weird, and most definitely different when I thought about my attachment to that forest. No other staff member seemed to engage with the forest in the same way that I did. I did not understand the role that Nature played in my life until just recently when I came across a theory described by Davis et al., (2000):

*A participatory epistemology* is a theory that asserts that all aspects and objects of the world – animate and inanimate – participate with humans in the ongoing project of knowledge production. Knowing about a tree, for example, entails insight into ways that the tree is woven into a grander relational web. Although most often associated with non-western sensibilities, participatory epistemologies ...are usually associated with a resurgence in interest in ecological and spiritual matters. (pp. 14-15)

By bringing my students for a walk, it was my hope that their senses would become heightened by the experience and that their participation would enhance their knowledge production and that this would translate into their poetry. But I also hoped that perhaps they, too, would garner an appreciation for the tender beauty that a forest can offer and come away with an embodied knowing.

Allowing students “to explore and learn the givens of the world and his or her place in it” (Plotkin, 2008, p. 120) gives him/her an opportunity to see how s/he “fits in among the givens” (p. 120). A person *needs* to learn about the world in order to live in it and by venturing outside I was offering an experiential opportunity beyond learning styles and intelligences but rather a way of being in the world where “attentive receptivity” and “meander knowing” (Beeman & Blenkinsop, 2008, p. 99) could flourish.

In addition, metaphorically trees present a wonderful representation of human growth and developments the core trunk representing a body, the roots representing the core development where the more growth that takes place the

deeper the roots reach down into the earth. The branches of a tree offer the many and varied opportunities for diversification and extension of each learning opportunity. The leaves represent our transformative potential with their ever-changing colours and then eventual release from the branch. The bare branch represents an incubation period where new learning is forming. Eventually buds emerge and leaves blossom outwards towards the sun, and a transformation is upon us. But as mentioned above trees are woven into grander systems where a:

Tree is caught up in webs of exchange, providing shelter and sustenance for many varieties of insect, bird, reptile, and mammal (not to mention more microscopic forms of life). They in turn pollinate its blossoms, distribute seeds, and fertilize its roots. The interdependencies extend even further as these living forms participate with others in the interchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide and in the movement of water around the planet—aspects of seasonal patterns and annual cycles that unite ground and sky, organic and inorganic, life and death, past and present, possibility and actuality. (Davis et al., 2000, p. 7)

The forest, viewed as a complex ecosystem, is an even more provocative metaphor than I initially envisioned. By engaging in this very process of interpreting this narrative, it has forced me to consider the role that Nature plays in my life. “Knowing is about who [I am] and what [I am] doing, and it unfolds within interlaced sets of political, social, and environmental conditions” (Davis et al., p.11). Coming to an understanding of these conditions allows me to improve my teaching and learning practice only if I take action. How I see the world (through Nature) affects how I act (take the students for a walk in the forest); how I act affects how I see the world. “All practice is theorized and all theory influences practice” (Davis et al., p.11). Is not this why we are here on this earth, to learn and grow and reshape who we are?

### **Narrative 7—Doors**

*We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are.*  
*Anais Nin*

#### *Childhood Into Adolescence: My Foundational Story*

Sports played a central role in my school career from elementary school through high school. I ran cross-county, participated in track and field events, and played on the basketball, volleyball, and swim teams. In addition to school sports, I competed for the local summer swim team that led to a tryout and placement with the North York Aquatic Club during my grade 8 year. I also competed in tennis outside of school, playing 4 to 6 hours per day during the summer months and competing in local and regional tournaments. Needless to say, being athletically involved in a variety of sports dominated my story growing up.

This carried over into the classroom, specifically the gym, during my Physical Education classes. I excelled, earning straight As at report card time. However, with regards to straight pen-to-paper academic subjects, I usually averaged anywhere from the mid-60s to high 70s. Math was the area of study that I struggled with the most. However, developing my natural athletic ability through dedicated practice, commitment, and perseverance built up my confidence and self-esteem both on the court and off the court, and this helped me get through the weaker academic part of my life. A strong knowledge base was continually being developed, initially from interactions with my family to my own personal experiences from being involved on teams and through

individual sports. Unbeknownst to me at the time, my athletic ability would open many doors for me.

### *The Athletic Door*

In high school I played basketball for 4 years and was Captain of the team for 3 years. I earned MVP during my last 2 years of high school play and was invited to try out for the Toronto Star All-Star Basketball Team in my final year. My achievements on the court caught the eye of the University of Toronto head coach, who invited me to tour the new athletic complex during my graduation year from high school. To be accepted into the Physical and Health Education program I needed to have at least a 75% academic average. My overall grade 13 average was 65%. When the acceptances came out in June 1980, I had gained entry into university through the athletic door.

While I was in the physical education program at U of T, I always felt that I was living a lie and that the only reason I got into the program was because of my athletic ability. I believed that I wasn't smart enough to be there. This story had been playing out and haunting me since as early as grade 7. When I entered junior high school in 1973, I always wanted to be in either Class 71 or 72, where the smart kids were streamed. I was in Class 79, an especially rowdy class. I didn't want to be with the behavioural kids who disrupted my learning. I wanted to be with people who wanted to learn. I felt that if I could just get into either one of those classes, then I, too, would become smart. This yearning to be recognized for my intelligence is a personal story that has been embedded into my story for more than 30 years.



*My Athletic Journey Continues...*

During my years at U of T, I began an arduous physical journey in a new sport, the triathlon. At that time, the sole event, called the Ironman Triathlon, was held in Hawaii every October. It is a long distance endurance event that incorporates swimming, biking, and running. When I watched this event on television for the first time, I knew instantly that I had to be a part of it. I felt as though I had been preparing for this moment all my life. All the hours I had previously spent practicing in the various sports had become the training ground for a future in this new sport. This is the only time in my life that I truly feel that I was called to adventure.

I embraced this prospect and devoted the next 8 years of my life to training and racing in triathlons around the world. My triathlon years created a major turning point in my life. My physical and mental limitations were tested on a daily basis as I pushed myself beyond the barriers I may have had for myself. Little did I know that this would open yet another door to the next chapter of my life.

*The Athletic Door...Again*

After my career as a triathlete, I was convinced by several people to apply to Faculties of Education and train to become a teacher. I hesitantly applied, wondering what I was getting myself into. Would I end up teaching a class like 79? However, with a 67% average from U of T, the chance of being accepted into a teaching faculty anywhere was slim at best. My first two choices turned me down. But when I opened that third envelope, I was

shocked. I had been accepted into a reputable teacher-training program as a Junior/Intermediate Physical and Health Education specialist.

When I arrived at the Faculty in the fall of 1990, the physical education cohort was invited to our supervisor's home for a wine and cheese get-acquainted evening.

As I made my way around the room meeting people, I fell into a conversation with my professor. "So *you* are the gal that completed the Ironman three times," he said sizing me up. Then we proceeded to talk about endurance events, training, and racing. I'm speculating, but just the way he said, "So *you* are the gal..." made me think that completing the Ironman played a role in my acceptance into the program. It must have. I knew my marks, based solely on their own merit, weren't strong enough to garner me entrance. Based on the conversation with my supervisor, I made the assumption that once again I got into an academic course through the athletic door. Internal questions surrounding my academic ability started to surface once again. My inner voice replayed the same message over and over again: "I'm here this time because I completed the Ironman triathlon, not because I'm smart enough." Was I ever going to gain entrance to anything based on my academic ability?

### *The Door is Ajar*

As I entered into this next phase, I wasn't convinced that a teaching life was for me. I secretly told myself that if I didn't enjoy teaching I would find another career and do it quickly. I did not want to get stuck in a job that I

didn't take pleasure in, especially one that had such a profound effect on children's lives.

It didn't take long before I realized that I had a talent for teaching. I taught instinctively and made what turned out to be intuitive decisions. It felt so natural to teach. How did this "knowing" arrive? Was it a result of my 8 years traveling and competing in triathlons around the world that preceded my journey into teaching? Did that rich experience give me another perspective that possibly a younger teacher fresh out of the Faculty of Education may not possess? Maybe it was the direct and/or indirect influence of growing up in a family surrounded by teachers and their constant discussion and dialogue about books, politics, and the world around us? Maybe it was simply the maturity that I had at 30 years over a 23-year-old entering the teaching profession, or perhaps something else. I had arrived, but I still had a long way to go.

As I inched the door open to get a better look, I began to see the possibilities. I truly felt that I was making a difference in the lives of the adolescents I was teaching. The joy and fulfillment I experienced from teaching and learning alongside my students exceeded any expectations I may have had. As I stepped into my role with both feet firmly planted on the ground, I started honing my craft. I was on my way.

### *My Transition*

I believe how one arrives at teaching often directly reflects upon one's "way" of teaching. I arrived through the athletic door after years of training and competing in various sports and completing a Bachelor of Physical and Health

Education. So teaching physical education seemed like a natural progression for me; however, it was short lived. I knew within a few short years that teaching only physical education for the duration of my career would not fulfill me as a person. I became bored and restless teaching isolated skills. If I was going to stay in teaching, I wanted to have an experience that would allow me to have a deeper connection with a group of students. I wanted to have my own homeroom. What I did not foresee was that I was yearning for a mind, body, and spirit connection, but I had not named this deeper connection as such. I needed to move through this door and into another room. When the opportunity presented itself, I moved from the gym into a classroom setting, where I taught Language Arts, Mathematics, and Social Studies.

I entered the classroom with great trepidation. Teaching an academic program was not my area of expertise. This, coupled with years of believing that I wasn't smart enough, made the transition all the more challenging. In spite of my apprehension, I somehow knew the classroom was where I was meant to be. Would the students respond to me in the same way that they did in the gym? Was I stereotyped as only a gym teacher? These questions played out in my head but didn't stop me from making the move.

When I began teaching academic subjects, I realized that I had a solid base in general knowledge that I could mine. However, I was surprised by how much I learned from the students I worked with. This was when I first realized that teaching and learning were reciprocal in nature. Here I was engaged in pedagogical thoughtfulness (van Manen, 1990; 1991) where I was teaching by

mindfulness that I intuitively possessed. What I know now is that I need to be in a place where people are encouraged to dialogue (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999), to share ideas, to examine the world through the eyes of others, and to learn in community with other human beings to be truly fulfilled.

I also realized that students needed to see the “big picture” in order to understand the patterns that exist in the universe before they can find their place in it. This is where knowledge starts to make sense, in the construction of it (Vygotsky, 1978). Knowledge becomes “whole,” not fragmented into segmented parts (J. P. Miller, 1996; R. Miller, 1997). In this transformational approach, the curriculum and the learner are no longer seen as separate, but connected. This was the type of classroom I was creating for my students and for myself, a place where deep learning would flourish; a place where the mind, body, and spirit are addressed in balance and harmony (R. Miller, 2000). Is this what I was missing from my own education and why I did so poorly in academic subjects? Were my individual needs as a learner not met? Is this why I teach with the whole child in mind? Is this what subconsciously led me to teaching in the first place? All I knew for sure was that I was in the right room.

### *Practice to Theory*

I continued to teach intuitively with the whole student in mind, but after my first formal teacher evaluation my administrator recommended that I formalize my practice with the theory behind what I was doing. As suggested, I volunteered on many curriculum-writing teams and was initiated into the world of curriculum theory and design. After working on three major project teams, I

decided to learn about curriculum in more depth. I applied to the Brock University Master of Education program. Once again I had to send in my transcripts from the Bachelor of Physical and Health Education program as well as my transcripts from the Bachelor of Education program, which reflected a 78% average. I also had to send in two letters of reference, one from an Administrator and one from someone who could recommend me from an academic position. What door, if any, would allow entrance this time?

*Master of Education: The Naming of My World*

Upon a second review of my application, I gained entrance into the Master of Education program in curriculum theory development at Brock University. It was during this time that I read Palmer's (1998) *The Courage to Teach*, Kessler's (2000) *The Soul of Education*, and J. P. Miller's (1996, 2007) *The Holistic Curriculum*. These books "named" for me what I was already doing in my classroom, allowing me to transform my teaching practice and teaching environment even further than I ever imagined.

I was fascinated by holism specifically the notion of balance, inclusion, and connection (J. P. Miller, 2007) with respect to how I could encourage and create transformational learning moments, but I was also intrigued by Kessler's (2000) notion of spirituality. Spirituality that goes beyond social and emotional learning and intelligence theory all of which are important but that begins with the heart (Kessler). To add to that Tobin Hart (2009) explained, when referring guides such as William James, Krishnamurti and Emerson, "our wise guides from across the globe seek an education of inner significance that provides an

opportunity for ‘bringing forth’ the inner person rather than simply ‘putting in’ information; they speak of unfolding rather than simply molding an individual” (p. 7). Is this what Kessler meant by heart? Yet in addition to all of these ways of knowing there were experientially learning opportunities that resonated with me on all these levels: through my walks with my mom when I was 5 years old, to the feeling I would get when I would ride 100 miles on my bike on a quiet Sunday morning. By sensing that everything exists in relationship and in a context of connection and meaning, much like J. P. Miller’s view of holistic education in terms of balance, inclusion, and connection, I realized that nothing can be learned in isolation. The mind, body, and spirit elements are integral parts of one another. This is what I was attempting to do in my classroom, create experiential learning opportunities in order to achieve an atmosphere where connection and meaning could flourish, but I also I had to make available a safe, caring learning environment where students had an ongoing feeling of emotional security and a feeling of being valued.

To provide a home where the students and I have established a transformational environment resulting in the building and constructing of the curriculum together is an environment I have been striving to create since the first day I walked into the classroom. Building a safe, caring learning environment, one that fosters a holistic pedagogy, has allowed me to become a cocreator of the curriculum alongside my students.

I knew that the teaching and learning environment I had created for my students and myself was providing our community with an enriching, deep

learning experience. I surpassed every expectation I imagined a “teaching life” to be. This is what was missing from my own education.

Upon the successful defense of my thesis, “What nourished the spirit of the adolescent in the classroom?” I was elated and deeply satisfied to have accomplished such an undertaking that resulted in the creation of new knowledge. It was a lonely journey, but I was committed to the research process and persevered to the end, but then again I was used to that after training for so many long hours in solitude for the triathlon. I was breaking new ground with my study, but I was used to that from pioneering a new sport, the triathlon, before many people had even heard of it. I had to defend my research, but in all the sports I competed in I had to test myself against the clock or other players to demonstrate my improvement. Maybe an athletic life and an academic life aren’t so different after all?

I might have halted my academic journey right there if it weren’t for a certain someone saying, “Aren’t you going to go on; you seem like the type of person who likes to learn and conduct research?” I was taken aback. I had never thought of myself in this light before. I never envisioned myself as an academic. A new door had just been swung open for me *if* I wanted to enter and take that next step.

*PhD*

And so I find myself in the PhD in Educational Studies program. Guess what? I entered through the academic door.



### *Hermeneutic Interlude*

This piece of writing has become a seminal work for me. Grumet (1988) suggests that “to tell a story is to impose form on experience” (p. 87). This particular story has not only formed but also shaped my thinking, allowed me to gain a new perspective, and in doing so it has given me the means to transform the experience. The content reflects the struggles I faced as a student in a system that valued (and still values) academic standing, grades, and competition. I felt inadequate in school, even dumb at times, and a big part of me suffered low self-esteem due to my low academic standing. I wrote this piece in a narrative course I undertook during my first year in the PhD program. The content that emerged became the catalyst for a transformational moment. For the first time in my life, after having 12 years in the educational system as a teacher, I explored the root of my academic struggles and how it affected my self-esteem as a student within a rigid, what Freire (1970) calls the “banking concept” (p. 72), educational system. In this system I was viewed as a receptacle to be filled by the teacher. I was encouraged to memorize the “narrated content,” thus “receiving, filing and storing the deposits” (Freire, p. 72). I was not a successful academic student in this system. However, I was a successful athlete in this system, so I examined my position as an athlete, where my self-esteem flourished. In addition, I extended my examination to how individuals making decisions in the educational establishment dealt with me as an athlete. I was revered and given what I believe was lenient postsecondary entry considerations because I was a gifted athlete. I do not have any concrete proof, but I do know that my overall academic average in grade 13 did not meet the qualification standard for entry into a Bachelor of Physical and Health Education (BPHE) program, nor did my overall academic average from my BPHE meet the qualification for entry into the Faculty of Education, and yet I was accepted into both programs.

Being an athlete allowed me to navigate and travel through a system where the door would have otherwise been closed to an average student like me. Deep down I felt like I cheated the system. I gained entry into university

because I was a gifted athlete and not a high-achieving academic student. At least this is what I always believed until two enduring events unfolded in my life. First was entering the PhD program and being able to examine my self more methodically through the research process, and second, having the opportunity to teach Foundational Methods in the Department of Teacher Education at the Faculty of Education. Both of these opportunities allowed me to gain a perspective about myself that I perhaps would not have had the opportunity to explore.

All through the PhD program I was able to customize my program and build on my areas of interest, two of which are narrative research and the teaching self. What I began to seriously consider was just how essential the role of the teacher is in a student's life. Hence this "self-study" emerged so I could examine if and how I can improve my own practice so that I can ensure that I adequately meet the diverse needs of the students in my class. When I made the decision to research the self I went on a Vision Quest (VQ) in Utah. After the first 3 days I still had not been able to identify the root of my wounded child, my "emotional, sensual, playful and vulnerable part" (Plotkin, 2003, p. 93). I was the only participant in a group of seven who had not identified the part of my life that needed to be healed. On the fourth day we drove from Colorado to our solo sites in Utah. We were given the task to tell our life stories in the third person. It wasn't until I was given this task that my wound became evident. I started, "Once upon a time there was a little girl named Hilary...." and so the story unfolded. When I reached the stage in my life when I started to feel dumb, unintelligent, and/or not smart due to my report card results, I broke down. Where did all this emotion surface from? I was moved by this experience, since my wounded child had eluded me up until this point in this rather emotional VQ process. Even though 2 years earlier I had identified this issue in the narrative course I undertook, it was only through the oral retelling of my story that I realized that I had not worked through the anguish I experienced during my adolescent years and into young adulthood with regards to what I deemed poor achievement as highlighted on my report cards.

Along with this research of self-discovery, I began to teach the Foundational Methods course to beginning teachers. It was during my second year teaching this course, while at the same time in the midst of generating my data and interpreting it for this dissertation, that I had an epiphany. After many discussions with my classes around the topic of high achievement in the form of a grade as opposed to growth as representation of learning, I realized that the group of students/beginning teachers who sat before me had to earn a high overall average to enter the Faculty of Education. They had been initiated, albeit vicariously by virtue of being a student, in the very system they were training to become teachers in. What I have come to realize is that we are missing a selection of students who, like me, did not manage to earn a high average but who have the qualities that make a skillful and/or effective teacher. Entrance into this Teacher Education Program is weighted heavily on grades but does not necessarily provide the best teacher candidates. There is more to being a teacher than achieving high grades as a student. I keep this in mind when I am teaching beginning teachers by letting them know that “effective teaching and learning is a uniquely human endeavour” (Cooper, 2007, p. 27) and that teaching should focus on learning and not just on the achievement of high grades (Cooper).

It has been a gradual unfolding but recently I realized that being an athlete saved my soul, not teaching. I always presumed it was teaching that saved my soul and provided meaning and purpose in my life and I have written about this in a number of papers during my Master’s work and during my coursework for my PhD. But without my athletic prowess I would not have been accepted into the University of Toronto to complete my Bachelor of Physical and Health Education, nor subsequently, would I have been accepted into the Faculty of Education at Western to do my teacher training. Sport opened the door for me to pursue a teaching career and it also gave me a solid foundation rooted in disciplined hard work, commitment to a task and/or goal, and learning how to embrace the process of learning along the way towards the end result. I wonder where would I be today without my athletic foundation?

This piece of writing demonstrates my struggle with always finding an opening through the athletic door. Today I am thankful I had a door that was open and waiting for me to walk through.

The Vision Quest via my self-study research, and teaching at the Faculty of Education have made me acutely aware of why I need to continue to search for ways to improve my teaching and learning practice. This will be fully discussed in the final two chapters where I will discuss the themes and issues that have emerged and conclude the dissertation with the insights I have garnered throughout the entire self-study with particular reference to the writing as a method of inquiry process.

### **Emergent Themes**

Chapter Three was the Data Generation phase along with an initial interpretation of the data. After reading and rereading the narratives (data generation) and their accompanying Hermeneutic Interlude on numerous occasions the following themes emerged from the text.

1. Experiential Learning
2. Identity
3. Embodied Knowledge

In Chapter Four, I further analyze the three themes by framing a discussion using the metaphor of locatedness to make sense of how the embodiment of knowledge intersects with my various identities and my experiential learning experiences. This led me to a broader and deeper understanding of various learning theories and models that are accessible to learners and the paradigms and perspective that underscore the philosophy behind each learning theory. Throughout this in-depth analysis I continued to ponder the question, Where is experience located? By understanding where experience is located I move

closer to answering the question how do I improve my teaching and learning practice.

## CHAPTER FOUR: LOCATEDNESS

*Sifting through my notes I came across a scrap piece of paper. Frayed edges all the way around indicated that with attempted precision I had torn this segment off a larger piece of paper rendering this text of greater importance than whatever was on the remaining page. Using a fine point Pilot liquid pen in scribbled handwriting I had asked myself the question, "Where is experience located?" Holding the scrap piece in my hand I sat back sipping my coffee realizing I was still pondering the same question and wondering how long ago I had committed it to paper.*

### Where is Experience Located?

Writing about experience is challenging. According to The Oxford English Dictionary (1989) experience is "knowledge resulting from actual observation or from what one has undergone" (p. 563). Experience is what is happening to us all the time as long as we exist. But the concept of experience is a "complex, constructed reality" (Fox, 2008, p. 39), since experience in and of itself is "already an interpretation and in need of an interpretation" (Fox, p. 39). Put in the context of my self-study, when I wrote about a lived experience I was interpreting an event, and when I interpreted that event to search for meaning I was interpreting my interpretation. This was no easy hermeneutic task. For the most part my stories reflected an experiential learning process "whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984, p.38). While learning experientially I used the experience itself to help locate who I was as a learner and what I valued as a learner. I needed to feel knowledge, and for learning to become enduring I needed it to be located in

my body. However, writing about embodied knowledge is difficult “because our ability to locate embodied knowledge and subsequently make meaning of it is distracted by unbridled metaphors of location and bound by constricting theories of mind and body” (Jewett, 2008, p. 19). In addition to the epistemology of learning experientially as another way of knowing, and embodied knowledge, the construction of my identity while writing about my life and myself emerged. According to Eakin (2008), the connection between narrative and identity is “so close that one may speak of narrative identity” (p. ix). He believes that “our life stories are not merely *about* us but in an inescapable and profound way *are* us, at least insofar as we are players in the narrative identity system that structures our current social arrangement” (Eakin, p. x). I needed to find a way to frame the discussion of the entwined themes of experiential learning, embodied knowledge, and identity that emerged through the writing process and that were interpreted in the Hermeneutic Interlude.

It was at this juncture that I came across a book by Laura M. Jewett (2008) entitled *A Delicate Dance: Autoethnography, curriculum, and the semblance of intimacy*. In her book, Jewett couples her experiences teaching multicultural education and learning to zydeco dance in order to explore semblances of intimacy across the self and other. In order to accomplish this she uses Elspeth Probyn’s (1990) chapter “Travels in the Postmodern: Making sense of the local” in order to ground the discussion of zydeco in relation to dancing and ultimately to attempt to “pin down the dancing body as a site of knowledge” (Jewett, p. 23). It was then that I stepped back and reflected on the

question I had scribbled and kept on that scrap piece of paper so long ago, “Where is experience located?” For Jewett, it was in the dancing body and for me it was in the experiential learning body, but to understand this more fully I, too, explored and extended Probyn’s metaphor of locatedness to make sense of how embodiment intersects with my identity and my experiential learning experiences.

Probyn (1990) used the overall metaphor of locatedness, specifically the use of the terms local, locale, and location, so as to consider them in relation to each other. Through a feminist lens Probyn arranged these abstractions and “[brought] them down to earth” (p. 177) while critiquing how postmodernists have appropriated feminist work. She stressed that the different levels of abstractions and their theoretical constructs allowed for different forms of practice and that “the ‘ground’ of practice is, after all not an empirically knowable entity but lies in our ways of thinking” (p. 178). She defines local as a practice that is “directly issuing from or related to a particular time” (p. 178). Locale is used to designate a place; however, “place” holds both a discursive and nondiscursive arrangement meaning “we are continuously working to make sense of and articulate both place and event” (p. 182). Last, I use the metaphor of location as “the epistemological process that renders the local and locale knowable” (Jewett, 2008, p. 23). Put another way, it is through the emergent theme embodied learning (location) that I render learning experientially (local) and the various identities I inhabit (locale) knowable. Location is integral to “that process which determines what we experience as knowledge and what we



know as experience” (Probyn, p. 184). According to Jewett the level of abstraction between the terms local, locale, and location, can provide us with an “interpretive intersection, where considerations of local practice rub up against epistemological questions about how such knowing is done, or can be done” (p. 21).

When I asked the question where is experience located, it was then that I began to interrogate how one thinks, experiences things, and ultimately how one comes to know. Throughout this interrogation I came to a broader understanding of the various learning theories and models that are accessible to learners and the paradigms and perspectives that underscore the philosophy behind each learning theory. As I explored the three main themes that emerged from my collection of narratives: experiential learning, identity, and embodiment, under the metaphor of locatedness and grounded in the various learning paradigms, I have been able to question my epistemology and have rendered it incomplete.

In the following sections I attempt to ground experiential learning as one of the local practices in my life that emerged from the collection of narratives. Next, I attempt to establish how I formed my identity in spaces and places in and out of the classroom and on and off the playing field using the metaphor locale. Last, I explore embodiment as a potential site or location of knowledge that makes available my various identities and epistemology knowable.

### Local

Local experiences are “practices which are directly stitched into the place and time which give rise to them” (Probyn, 1990, p. 178). During my formative years, learning experientially was a practice that was stitched into time and place, as was the behaviourist learning paradigm which dominated the formal educational landscape (Brandt & Perkins, 2000) and into today. While writing my collection of narratives my penchant for needing to learn experientially in a school setting was exposed. My stories portrayed a home life where on a consistent basis many experiential opportunities were promoted and provided for me. Conversely, at school in a more formal educational setting, on only a few occasions did I undergo experiential learning opportunities. These were the experiences I remembered and selected to write about, not the day-to-day behaviourist “transmission position” (J. P. Miller, 2007, p. 10) learning opportunities I experienced. In a transmission position, there is a “one-way flow of skills and knowledge” with “little or no opportunity to reflect on or analyze the information” (Miller, p. 10), much like behaviourism and its stimulus-response relationship. Perhaps understanding Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory juxtaposed the various learning paradigms, may lead me to an answer for the question, where is experience located. It also may address why this cyclical model was essential for me to have a meaningful learning engagement.

Experiential learning, as a learning theory, falls under the paradigm philosophy and/or pedagogical approach of humanism. A central assumption of

humanism, according to Huitt (2001), is that people act with intentionality and values. This is in contrast to the behaviorist notion of operant conditioning, or stimulus-response, which argues that all behavior is the result of the application of consequences. Humanists also believe that discovering knowledge or constructing meaning is central to learning (Bruner, 1967) and that it is necessary to study the person as a whole (J. P. Miller, 2007), a philosophy I, too, adhere to.

Kolb's (1984) experiential model is a four-stage cyclical theory of learning that holds a holistic perspective that combines experience, perception, cognition, and behaviour. In the four-stage process a person undergoes a concrete experience where the learner actively experiences an activity. Next, s/he makes a reflective observation. This is when the learner consciously reflects back on that experience. In the third stage, the person makes an abstract conceptualization where the learner attempts to conceptualize a theory or model of what is observed. In the final stage, s/he makes an active experimentation where the learner is trying to plan how to test a model of theory or plan for his/her next experience. When engaged in an experiential cycle of this nature, each experience is genuinely unique and cannot be duplicated. It is the “‘bringing forth’ the inner person rather than simply ‘putting in’ information” (Hart, 2009, p. 7) that is the intention of this teaching and learning process. Education becomes not just the transmission of information but where, for me, deep sustained knowledge was absorbed,

learned, and readily available for me transfer this knowledge into a new learning situation.

As mentioned earlier, local is “that [which is] directly issuing from or related to a particular time” (Probyn, 1990, p. 178). I underwent experiential learning experiences where authentic learning ensued; where a change in my conception was a real possibility. The experiences I had were stitched into time and place and could not be erased and/or changed; they happened, but over time have become reconceptualized.

As a result of these experiential learning opportunities my epistemology, or my way of knowing was unveiled by undergoing the experiences themselves. Put another way, the type of learning approach under which I learn best was brought to light for me. For example, in the first stage of Kolb’s (1984) cycle, as a young child I underwent an informal experience of simply walking in Coronation Park with my mom. I was encouraged, during the second and third stages of Kolb’s cycle, to undergo a reflective process. I followed this with a conceptual turn whereby I genuinely engaged and connected with the content.

My mom found a branch while we were walking and named it “bent like a bow by nature.” I held it and walked with it and used it as a walking stick. As I held it in my hands and touched it, I reflected on its texture, colour, flexibility, and its usefulness. Boyd and Fales (1983) define reflective learning as “the *process* of internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self, and which results in a changed conceptual perspective” (p. 100). When I was

given the opportunity and encouraged to reflect on my walking stick experience, this moved knowledge away solely from the mind and it became embodied. My inner being was brought forth. Kessler (2000) describes this inner being as the “soul” or the “inner life” or the “depth dimension of human experience” (p. x). It is difficult to put into words those particular personal experiential learning moments where ontological attention becomes transformational. There was an unfolding rather than a molding of my inner being (Hart, 2009). I was able to situate knowledge in my body, take action, and then apply that knowledge in a new situation. Both situated knowledge and embodied knowledge will be discussed in detail further on in the analysis.

Eventually, I was able to connect “bent like a bow by nature” to figurative speech as an example of an alliteration and a simile as well. The learning became layered and connected. I embodied the learning experience, not just as an example of finding a simple walking stick, but as an example of how powerful and descriptive language can become when the natural world is connected to my world. I am certain this type of experience paved the way for me to appreciate poetry and the natural world.

This is an example of hybridity theory, which recognizes the complexity of examining people’s everyday spaces and literacies (Bhabha, 1994; Soja, 1996). Hybridity theory posits that people draw on multiple funds of knowledge to make sense of the world. Multiple funds (or sources) of knowledge means that a person can learn in a variety of spaces from a variety of sources. For example, people can learn through formal education, in the field

experientially such as a co-op setting, playing on a team, in one's family, and so forth. Hybrid theory recognizes that each fund of knowledge one acquires can be transferred to another space. It more closely examines how being "in-between" (Bhabha, p. 1) several funds of knowledge can be "both productive and constraining in terms of one's literate, social, and cultural practices – and ultimately one's identity development (Birr Moje, et al., 2004, p. 42). In addition, hybridity theory connects to thirdspace, because thirdspaces are hybrid spaces that bring together various funds of knowledge. I was "in-between" my mom's teachings, nature, and experiencing figurative language firsthand.

It was while I was in this "in-between," hybrid or "third-space" that the role of the physical space influenced the socialization of interaction between my mom and me and concomitantly, how the social space shaped the physical (Birr Moje et al.). A deeper, more complete discussion of thirdspace theory will frame Chapter Six when I bring together the metaphor of locatedness with the idea of thirdspace as a hybrid space that not only connects, but reframes, recreates, and rebuilds (Soja, 1996)) as well as potentially transforms the learning space I create with my students.

If I had encountered the funds of knowledge I experienced with my Mom in Coronation Park, transmitted to me solely in a one-way flow via a book, a computer, or through direct instruction, I may not have had the experience that took me beyond gaining surface information. But when a "child learns symbols, but without personal, bodily, sensory experiences that make the symbols meaningful" (Crain, 2000, p. 382), then rote memorization occurs and

is experienced solely in the head and usually forgotten soon afterwards. When a child's only mode of learning is through a transmission approach, s/he is learning at too cerebral a level. "The child is becoming a disembodied mind" (Crain, p. 382). But when a child learns experientially, a deep connection between the experience and the content through the body is forged, and for me this kind of depth, authenticity, and connectedness was necessary for me to learn. I learn best through direct experience.

I had a transformational experience while walking with my mom in Coronation Park (Hart, 2009). I wonder if this penchant for embodied knowledge was driven by my natural athletic ability? I will extend this view further on in the next section under the metaphor of locale.

What became evident as I interpreted my stories and allowed the themes to emerge was that when I was in a formal educational setting I was predominantly exposed to deductive reasoning learning experiences in the hands of a system where I struggled academically. I was not exposed to many experiential learning opportunities. In my collection, I wrote about the two experiences that left an indelible mark on me. First was dramatizing the hanging of Louis Riel in history, and the second when I was exposed to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in grade 12.

Experiential learning and Maslow's motivational theory of self-actualization both fall under the humanist paradigm, a perspective that resonates with me. "Resonance implies that something vibrates us, moves us in some way" (Hart, 2009, p. 8). I was moved by both experiential learning

opportunities. However, on a day-to-day basis transmission learning, where knowledge was experienced “as fixed rather than as a process” (R. Miller, 2007, p. 10) was the predominant learning experience I was exposed to as a student, and yet I chose not to write about these experiences. Why did I choose to not write about any learning experiences that reflected a transmission position/approach? Did I not undergo at least one learning experience that reflected this mode of learning that was worth writing about in either a positive or negative fashion? I am certain I did, and yet I chose not to recollect any of them, leaving my one-sided humanistic/constructivist epistemology in full view.

Today, the constructivist paradigm—founded on the pioneering work of cognitive scientists (e.g. Bruner, 1967; Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978)—has become the predominant view of learning by many educational experts, particularly among faculties of education and national learning societies (Brandt & Perkins, 2000). Understanding the underpinnings of behaviourism and cognitivism may deepen my understanding of why I learn more effectively when a constructivist and humanistic approach is applied. Put another way, what was it about behaviourism and cognitivism that did not resonate with me?

In the behaviourist paradigm, Watson’s (1913) research on applying behaviourism to the principles of learning paved the way for Thorndike (1913) and his stimulus-response psychology, and Skinner’s (1938) operant conditioning.



In 1913, Thorndike published *Educational Psychology*, which influenced the educational field. He believed that “by reducing each human action to its smallest unit, that of stimulus and response,...[he] sought to establish the principles of human behavior that would permit its prediction” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995, p. 92). In educational terms, he “insisted that whatever behaviour constituted the child’s response to a particular stimulus indicated the content of that child’s learning. In a phrase response = learning. This conception of learning would permit the quantification of responses, i.e. learning, for scientific study” (Pinar et al., p. 92). The human mind was likened to a machine with millions of individual connections but which may not have any logical relationships between them. Information was seen as disparate and fragmented. This paved the way for quantifying and measuring knowledge, but it was measuring only the surface layer, the layer that is viewed as the “currency for educational exchange” (Hart, 2009, p. 2).

Skinner (1938) and his behavioural theory of operant conditioning followed suit. He believed that behaviour was controlled by the reinforcing stimuli that followed it. This was known as operant conditioning where the “subject moved freely about and ‘operates’ on the environment” (Crain, 2000, p. 178). In educational terms, Skinner (1968), through his invention of teaching machines and programmed instruction, found learning most rapid when instruction was immediately reinforced. The information presented was broken down into small steps, this was followed by active participation, and then immediate feedback was given. In this behavioural paradigm “by arranging

reinforcers in specific ways, the teacher [could] increase certain desired behaviors” (J. P. Miller, 1996, p. 15). Skinner wanted to make learning a positive experience for students, albeit in a very programmed and specific way. In this layer of knowing, surface “information can then open up into *knowledge*, where direct experience often brings together the bits of information into the whole of mastery and skill” (Hart, 2009, p. 2).

It is clear that Skinner’s and Thorndike’s behaviourist psychology are atomistic; both are “programmed [in] learning techniques [that] break behavior down into small bits that can be manipulated. Small identifiable components are used to organize student progress by means of sequential steps” (J. P. Miller, 1996, p. 15). According to Miller, contemporary atomism can be characterized by the following principles:

- Reality is based in materialism.
- This reality can be reduced to logical components or atoms.
- We know through our senses.
- We can use the findings of empiricism to develop a technology to control the material world.
- It is possible to approach inquiry from a value neutral position. (p. 12)

Behaviourism provided the “psychological context for atomistic approaches to curriculum and instruction” (Miller, p. 16). Contemporary atomism fractures and segments learning opportunities whereby reduction of information is emphasized and squeezed into small, disconnected parts. Often there was little relevance to the information being learned. “Relevance implies that we are

conscious that an idea or topic relates to us or something we are close to” (Hart, 2009, p. 8). The more relevant, the topic the more interest is activated. Perhaps this is why I did not write any stories about transmission learning. They were not relevant to me, and therefore I was not interested. Or perhaps I did not have a teacher who was a powerful speaker able to create transformative moments in transmission style. In this paradigm, behaviourism is in alignment with Freire’s (1970) notion of the “banking” concept of education where the learner is viewed as a container or a receptacle to be filled by the teacher. Memorization is an important skill to master if one is to be successful in this paradigm. “Education becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (Freire, p. 72). There is no room for a constructivist or humanistic approach to teaching and learning in this paradigm.

Throughout my formal education, the majority of teachers I encountered used a transmission approach to teaching and learning, which was greatly influenced by behaviourism and stimulus-response where the relationship between knowledge and the learner was a one-way flow. The teacher was viewed as the “sage on the stage” imparting knowledge. However, at times I experienced another educational orientation, the transactional position, where the flow of information was a two-way flow between what was being learned and my learning experience. Mr. Parker was this kind of teacher. He was a powerful speaker who transmitted knowledge but he also encouraged dialogue and honoured our opinions. In this layer of knowing, “knowledge opens the

possibility of intentionally cultivating *intelligence*, which can cut, shape, and create information and knowledge through the dialectic of the intuitive and the analytic” (Hart, 2009, p. 2). However, this interaction was mainly cognitive “since analysis [was] stressed more than synthesis and thinking more than feeling” (J. P. Miller, 2007, p. 11) which leads me into a discussion on cognition and learning.

Cognitivism or cognition essentially argues that the “black box” of the mind should be opened and understood. The learner in this paradigm is viewed as an information processor, and knowledge is viewed as schema or symbolic mental constructions. The learner is seen as “rational and capable of intelligent behaviour” (J. P. Miller, 2007, p. 11). Mental processes such as thinking, memory, knowing, and problem-solving are explored in this epistemological stance, and teaching models usually have some set of procedures for inquiry and problem solving (Miller).

In a transactional cognitive paradigm a rationalist Cartesian mind-body split is presented. This theory has its source in “René Descartes’s well-known separation of the thinking mind, or subject, from the material world of things, or objects” (Abram, 1996, p. 32). “For Descartes, the body was associated with irrationality, emotion, and deception – it was only the mind, or the ‘disembodied self,’ that could perform acts of pure reason” (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007, pp. 13-14). I was being channeled to become a disembodied self in a formal school setting. I can relate to Tobin Hart (2009) when he shares his own formal educational experience in *From Information to Transformation*:

While I know people who have had good educational experiences, mine felt as if I was living on Novocain; I knew a vibrant world was out there. I just couldn't really feel it through education. Schooling seemed mainly to foster a numbness that kept my own knowing and immediacy of the world at a distance. The exceptions were those rare times when something or someone was so sharp as to break through the haze or when I was granted enough freedom and encouragement to meet the world firsthand. (p. 3)

In a formal educational setting, I felt this "world at a distance" firsthand. I became "one of a type" (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000, p. 236) where "entities [are] understood in terms of apparently independent, decontextualized properties" (Packer & Goicoechea, p. 236). However, in my home learning environment, I was exposed to the interconnections between knowledge and the body. My "direct experience [was] necessarily subjective, necessarily relative to [my] own position or place in the midst of things, to [my] particular desires, tastes, and concerns" (Abram, p. 32).

Packer and Goicoechea (2000) believe that the shift from student to family member is "already an ontological transformation" (p. 235) and that "the child assumes different modes of subjectivity in the two different contexts" (p. 236). I know I experienced this. At school I was subject to a learning environment with "explicit rules and the implicit sanctions of the classroom community" (p. 236) and where learning was primarily experienced along a "single axis of achievement...as a functional preparation for the different tasks

and strata of adult life” (p. 236). Whereas at home, since I was always encouraged to freely engage with the world, my learning experiences were varied, rich, and often authentic in nature. In this layer of knowing, “*understanding*, which takes us beyond the power of intelligence to look through the eye of the heart, a way of knowing that serves character and community” exists (Hart, 2009, p. 2). This layered “experience then has the possibility for cultivating *wisdom*, which blends insight into what is true with an ethic of what is right” (Hart, p. 2), which leads me to a third educational orientation, the deepest layer of knowing—transformational learning, which “acknowledges the wholeness of the child” (J. P. Miller, 2007, p. 11) and encourages embodied knowing.

“The aim of the transformation position is the development of the whole person. The student is not reduced to a set of learning competencies or thinking skills but is seen as a whole being” (J. P. Miller, 2007, p. 11). In order to aim for a transformation position one must aim for a whole epistemology, an epistemology that includes a balance, inclusiveness, and connection. First, a balance between the dualisms that exist in teaching and learning such as content versus process and knowledge and imagination to name a few, should be maintained. Both are important. A whole epistemology should be inclusive of all types of learning positions including transmission, transactional, and transformation and implemented in relation to one another and not separated and fragmented. Last, connection between the relationships that exist such as linear thinking and intuition and mind and body should be addressed through

various techniques such as metaphor and movement and dance (J. P. Miller, 2007). In aiming towards a whole epistemology one is seen as trying to enhance a typically undervalued way of knowing. When this approach to knowing is utilized, embodied knowledge becomes a place of possibility. As cited in Brooks and Hesse-Biber (2007), Longino argues that knowledge *is* “possible for the embodied subject” and that our bodies are situated in “particular places, in particular times, oriented in a particular way to their environments” (p. 14). I concur with Longino in that I believe that embodied knowledge *is* possible when we are given transformational opportunities to explore knowledge this way.

For example, skillful teachers find opportunities to integrate curriculum where aligning curriculum, content, assessment, and instruction (Drake, 2007) is the goal. Skillful teachers use backwards design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) to plan and incorporate creative learning moments with a clear vision, from the outset, of an authentic culminating performance task. In their unit of study they embed teaching strategies such as creative problem solving, co-operative learning, and the arts, while continually focusing on the final authentic performance task. In addition, skillful teachers encourage their students to make various types of connections throughout their learning journey, and “these connections make learning personally and socially meaningful to the student” (Miller, 2007, p. 12). According to Bergsma (2002):

We no longer strive for the Cartesian image of an isolated rational thinker, for it is now recognized that we have many influences in the

development of our knowledge. The relational aspect of our being and whether we are embodied male or female is recognized as an important factor in the development and recognition of the knower and of knowledge. (p. 22)

Teaching for transformative embodied knowing builds in an inclusiveness and wholeness that eludes a transmission approach to teaching and learning.

However, opening oneself into this deep layer of knowing—a transformational moment—“does not take away from the information exchange but makes it richer, gives it context, and brings it alive” (Hart, 2009, p. 2).

In a formal school setting I was being educated from the head up when what I really needed was to be exposed to embodied experiential learning opportunities that could be felt and understood viscerally. Perhaps this is why I chose not to write about my learning experiences under a transmission behavioural orientation. For me learning from the head up did not leave a resonant feeling within my body. No one singular event spurred me on to actively write a story during the data generation phase. However, in an experiential lived moment, as described in the story *Nuclear Family*, an example of a nuclear family was revealed to me in an authentic way.

Subsequently, writing about how resonant and relevant this concept was allowed to unfold for me, in an authentic experiential way, was infinitely more interesting a concept for me to consider writing about than when, in a formal setting, a teacher instructed me to “open my textbook to page 230, read the first five paragraphs and then answer the questions numbered 1 through 5 on page



232.” Which story would you feel compelled to write about, *Nuclear Family* or this one? Still again, which story would you feel compelled to read? My local experiential learning practices were “directly stitched into the place and time which [gave] rise to them” (Probyn, 1990, p. 78) juxtaposed the transmission experiences I chose not to write about. What I do know is that my body craved more transformational experiential learning opportunities and still does.

Next, I explore the identities that emerged from my lived experience using the metaphor of locale. The concept of locale serves to emphasize the lived contradictions of place and event. It allowed me to emphasize how I struggled to become subject in each of the locales I inhabited and how I embraced and rejected various subjectivities in relation to the power relations that existed in each time frame.

### **Locale**

The construction of my identity while writing about my life and myself surfaced (Eakin, 2008). At the time I was unaware that this was occurring, but as I entered the Hermeneutic Interlude phase, I became aware of various identity constructions that surfaced in my stories. According to Eakin, narrative identity is formed through not only the cultural and social but also the neurobiological. “Insofar as narrative identity is concerned, if the somatic and the cultural come together, I would urge, it is not on the plane of theory but in the lived experience of ordinary individuals telling stories about themselves” (Eakin, p. xi). For me learning experientially is an embodied experience set in a particular social and cultural context stitched in time in the local, and through

the retelling of these experiential stories, the expression of my self-identity in narrative terms crystallized. Using the metaphor of locatedness, specifically locale at this point in the analysis, directed me to a space and time that held the place for me to engage in a “discursive and nondiscursive arrangement” (Probyn, 1990, p. 178). This in turn allowed me to highlight the struggles I faced as my identity as an unintelligent student/learner, athlete/teacher, and teacher/learner emerged in the collection of stories.

My identity has been formed through my lived experiences, by my culture, which is family, the communities I grew up in, and in a broader sense, Western civilization. By examining my collection of narratives, which are autobiographical, “[I] gain access to [an] individuals’ construction of their own identity” (Fivush & Buckner, 2003, p. 149). With this in mind, portrayals of my lived experiences in the narratives as student/learner, athlete, teacher/learner, and academic were not static in nature but rather fluid and dynamic, extending beyond each experience “changing both developmentally as well as situationally” (Fivush & Buckner, p. 149) according to the social or cultural context of the lived experience. Each of the identities I have recognized as essential to who I am have critical aspects that must be articulated in order to understand how these identities have helped to inform my teaching and learning practice. For example from my collection of narratives, my identity not just as a student/learner but rather my identity as an unintelligent student/learner was brought to light, which was vastly more illustrative of my schooling experience and my subsequent experience as a teacher and as an

academic. When we “negotiate our locales...we are continuously working to make sense of and articulate both place and event” (Probyn, 1990, p. 182) in addition to the temporality of event. I struggled to make sense of how each of my identities was formed, but by using the metaphor of locale under the umbrella of locatedness to organize my thinking, I was able to analyze my data by taking into account the surrounding place or setting where my identity was formed, the event or events that helped shape my identity, and last look at the temporality of the developmental time period that my identity was being formed.

At this stage of my life I am at a point where reevaluating my identity feels like a natural thing to do. According to Kroger (2007), “theorists and researchers have pointed to middle adulthood as an important time of identity reevaluation and transition for many, as they are called on to assume new roles in their relationships both with important others and with the broader community” (p. 171). My new role working with beginning teachers has given me the opportunity to reach that broader community in ways I never imagined possible for myself back in a time when I was an adolescent struggling academically.

#### *Unintelligent Student/Learner*

“Dominant images and themes of adult life stories may reflect influences from the earliest years of life” (McAdams, 2003, p. 193). This was certainly the case with regard to my experience as an unintelligent student/learner. As previously described, during my adolescent years I was

relegated to rote learning, memorization, and regurgitation of discrete facts: a transmission approach to teaching and learning. I was not able to absorb knowledge in this type of educational setting, and this was reflected in the grades I earned, which were for the most part average to below average. As a result of this measured evaluation I perceived myself as unintelligent.

According to Crawley, Foley, and Shehan, (2008), “identity is co-constructed between a person and the social context in which others label that person” (p. 23). During the developmental milestone of early adolescence my identity as an unintelligent student/learner emerged.

As I was navigating the locale of my junior high school in the social context of my fellow students I was placed in a mixed-ability class. However, I longed to be in the class where all the smart students were streamed. I thought that if I had been placed in the sociocultural context of high-achieving students, then I would be deemed smart, and this was what I secretly longed for. I wanted to be noted for my intelligence and not for my perceived lack of intelligence. Where did this longing originate? Why was it so important for me to be considered smart? Was it an internal pressure I placed on myself? Or did it come from an external source such as family values, school values, community values, or was it a pressure forced upon me by Western civilization as a whole? As I continue to analyze the three emergent themes, it is my hope that I will come to answer these questions in light of my thesis question, how do I improve my practice? Added to this recipe of perceiving myself as an unintelligent student/learner was my identity as a proficient athlete, and

together they collided, resulting in the stereotypical construct of being labeled a dumb jock. According to McAdams (2003):

To a certain degree, then, identity is a product of choice. We choose events that we consider most important for defining who we are and providing our lives with some semblance of unity and purpose, and we endow them with symbolism, lessons learned, integrative themes, and other personal means that make sense to us in the present as we survey the past and anticipate the future. (p. 196)

My identity as an unintelligent student/learner was an identity that was easy for me to construct. In spite of feeling intelligent when engaged in experiential learning opportunities at home, at school, where rote learning was the predominant teaching method, the grades I earned in this learning paradigm, were average to below average. In addition, my unintelligent/learner identity construct was reinforced through the intellectual successes of all my family members. My Mom, brother, and sister were all highly intelligent according to the measurable educational grading system, which I, was not. *However*, I was a gifted athlete. The continual tension that existed between struggling academically and being a highly capable athlete penetrated my being and made it easy for me to choose the identity of an unintelligent student/learner. It was an identity I considered essential when working towards coming to a better understanding of my present teaching/learning practice and how I could improve it. It provided me with the impetus to approach the teacher candidates I worked with and encourage them to explore how their identities were formed

with the hope that this in turn might impact their approach to their teaching and learning practice. Why do we make the choices we make with regards to the teaching and learning theories available for us to utilize? Why are we drawn to one learning paradigm, perspective, and/or philosophy over another? I believe our identity guides our choices. According to Packer and Goicoechea (2000):

knowing is not an end in itself, but a means to the ends of recognition and identity. The search for these ends is what leads people to 'participate in communities in many different ways' and occasions of what might seem a failure to learn can be reinterpreted as a struggle for identity. (p. 235)

Self-identifying as a struggling student is a theme that is beginning to make sense to me as a university lecturer for beginning teachers. My present role forced me to articulate that I have a unique intelligence, predominantly bodily-kinesthetic, where one has a wisdom of the body and ability to control physical motion (Gardner, 1983, 1993). However, during my junior high and high school years in the 1970s, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence was not valued as an intelligence per se, but rather as a demonstration of skills and perhaps a gift one was born with, something seen outside of intelligence. Here in the locale of my formal education I did not meet the cognitive criteria as an adolescent learner, but rather I was recognized for my athletic ability.

Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences (1983) does not fall under any one of the four learning paradigms, perspectives, and/or philosophies of behaviourism, cognitivism, constructivism, and/or humanism. Rather it is a

learning model where Gardner suggests seven ways that people understand or perceive the world: linguistic (words), logical-mathematical (inductive and deductive thinking and use of numbers), visual-spatial (mentally visualize objects and spatial dimensions), body-kinesthetic, musical-rhythmic (master rhythms, tones and beats), interpersonal (communicate effectively with other people), and intrapersonal (understand one's own emotions, motivation, inner states of being, and self-reflection).

Since Gardner's (1983) original listing there has been an additional intelligence added to the original seven. Naturalist intelligence, which recognizes human beings who can "categorize and draw upon certain features of the environment," became the eighth intelligence (Gardner, 1999, p. 48). In addition, Gardner discussed the potential for adding a spiritual, existential, and a moral intelligence to the existing eight, but concerns over the complexity with regards to defining these intelligences and what constitutes the content of each one created too much variability.

In a formal educational setting, Gardner's linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences are emphasized. But as Gardner suggests, if a teacher provided a more balanced curriculum that incorporates the arts, self-awareness, communication, and physical education, these may be useful in order to leverage the intelligences that some students may have (Gardner, 1983). I have ascertained that as a student/learner I would have benefited from such an approach in spite of the debates that challenge the theory's merit (Waterhouse, 2006) and critics who debate whether it is a learning theory at all

but rather stressing instead that the intelligences are synonymous for personality types (Learning Theories Knowledgebase, 2008). However, what I have realized is that what I learned from my career as an athlete—someone who is a bodily kinesthetic learner—outside of the four walls of a formal classroom provided me with opportunities to excel in all areas of life and at the same time helped me to navigate my unintelligent student/learner identity. This will be discussed in the next section, *Athlete/Teacher*. As mentioned earlier, my identities are not static in nature but rather fluid and dynamic, extending beyond each experience. According to Kroger (2007):

Movement from childhood through adolescence through adulthood is not just a matter of adding more and more information to an already existing structure of meaning making, but rather of changing the basic meaning-making structures themselves. This phenomenon enables the individual to interpret and understand his or her life experience in vastly different ways over the course of time. (p. 16)

The locale I inhabited as a university lecturer/academic allowed me to attempt to make meaning from my lived experiences, which influenced my identity formation. By making sense of the unintelligent student/learner story juxtaposed against my athletic prowess story, I am able to make meaning from how I constructed my identity. Highlighting this meaning-making story has assisted me in guiding teacher candidates to reflect on their lives. Now, if they choose to, they can begin to make sense of the identities they bring into the classroom.



My writing, teaching and learning lives have always overlapped. While immersed in the writing of my collection of narratives for this dissertation I began to openly share my struggles as an unintelligent student/learner with the groups of beginning teachers that I worked with at the Faculty of Education. I emphasized that the feeling I experienced of not being smart stayed with me a long time until I came to a personal understanding of what intelligence was for me. Today in the locale I inhabit, intelligence cannot solely be reduced to an IQ score obtained from a one-time achievement test. It also cannot be based solely on one theory of intelligence, such as Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences (1983). For me intelligence "involves helping all students capitalize on their strengths and compensate for or correct their weaknesses" (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2004, p. 274). Sternberg's (1985) triarchic model looks at intelligence, not from the particular material a person is processing as does Gardner's theory, but rather Sternberg looks to what he calls the componential, experiential, and contextual facets of intelligence.

Componential intelligence is the ability to be able to take apart problems and being able to see solutions not often seen. This form of analytical giftedness is the type that is tested most often. Experiential intelligence deals with both how well a task is performed in a novel situation and in an automated situation when a process has become automatized. Synthetic giftedness, a subtheory of experiential intelligence, is seen in creativity, intuition, and a study of the arts. People with synthetic giftedness are not often seen with the highest IQs because the IQ tests do not measure these attributes. Last, is the contextual

or practical intelligence, which “deals with the mental activity involved in attaining fit to context” (Sternberg, 1985, p. 45). Through adaptation, shaping and selection, individuals create an ideal fit between themselves and their environment, which leads to the notion of successful intelligence.

According to Sternberg and Grigorenko (2004):

*Successful intelligence* is the use of an integrated set of abilities needed to attain success in life, however an individual defines it, within his or her sociocultural context. Thus, there is no one definition of intelligence. People are successfully intelligent by virtue of recognizing their strengths and making the most of them at the same time they recognize their weaknesses and find ways to correct or compensate for them. Both are important. (p. 274)

Teaching for successful intelligence “attempts to help teachers reach a larger cross-section of students than more traditional teaching methods that emphasize memory and analytical instruction” (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2004, p. 275). Situated cognition is a learning theory that fits well with the concept of successful intelligence. Situated cognition deems that “knowledge is situated in context; context links activities, concepts, and culture; and learning involves understanding the associations among all three” (Brown et al., 1989 cited in Kim & Hannafin, 2008, p. 1838). Since successful intelligence espouses recognizing one’s strengths and weaknesses within a person’s sociocultural context, utilizing a learning theory such as situated cognition would link

activities, concepts, and culture in a situated context, making learning opportunities for students more meaningful.

Situated cognition differs from cognitivism in that it views learning as an “integral and inseparable aspect of social practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 31). It looks at knowledge not as a system of discrete facts to be memorized and replicated, but rather it views knowledge as having the power to renegotiate the meaning of the past and future in constructing the meaning of present circumstances” (Lave & Wenger, p. 34). It is potentially transformational. “To transform is to go beyond current form...and this is where the deepest moments in education lead” (Hart, 2009, p. 157). When transformational learning occurs, the process of learning is taken to be an integral aspect of practice as well as the outcome. “Knowledge is not viewed as something that is fixed in small units but as something that can change and be manipulated” (J. P. Miller, 2007, p. 11). Using a variety of learning theories will allow teachers to meet the learning requirements and needs of many students. “Many children fail to learn at a level that matches their ability to learn” (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2004, p. 274). I understand this now. I have gained an appreciation for my struggles as an unintelligent student/learner and have realized that I was not an unintelligent student/learner, but rather the way I was “taught and often assessed in school [did] not enable [me] to learn and perform in an optimal way” (Sternberg & Grigorenko, p. 274). So what is intelligence?

The concept of intelligence is a contentious issue. According to Haier and Jung (2008):

Although research in cognitive psychology has advanced considerably in the last two decades, it is still not known why some people learn faster than others, or why some people have better memories or longer attention spans than other people, or why some people are much better at mathematical reasoning than at spelling, or why some people are more creative than others. (p. 171)

Therefore, the notion of intelligence is relative to each individual based on their learning profile and the sociocultural context they grew up in (Sternberg, 2007). Randall (1995) suggests “the way we story our lives directly affects the way we understand ourselves; the way we understand ourselves directly affects the way we act; and the way we act directly affects the way the world is” (p. 9). I agree with this premise. Self-identifying as an unintelligent student/learner has affected how I view intelligence and in turn has had an impact on how I have imparted this knowledge to beginning teachers. My view is biased and one sided. Therefore, how I go about meeting the learning needs of my students is an important issue to address in my Foundational Methods classroom with beginning teachers.

Through the analysis phase of this dissertation, what crystallized for me was that I hold a constructivist epistemology with an ontology that lingers in the humanist paradigm. Simply stated, I believe in building knowledge through experiential learning opportunities while striving towards self-actualization. Sternberg’s (1997) successful intelligence is a learning theory that meets all of the aforementioned criteria. It falls under the constructivist paradigm where the

learner is a knowledge constructor. As mentioned previously, successful intelligence posits that there is no one definition of intelligence and that people are intelligent simply by recognizing their strengths and weaknesses and finding ways to compensate for them (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2004). Constructivist approaches, such as successful intelligence, “help learners to internalize reshape, or transform, new information. Transformation occurs through the creation of new understandings” (Grennon Brooks & Brooks, 1993, p. 15). When new understandings are internalized they tend to be situated in the body rather than solely in the head. In the opening vignette I asked the question, where is experience located? I am getting closer to an answer. Due to the fact that rote memorization was challenging for me, transformation rather than transmission of knowledge has always been vital to my teaching and learning practice. Constructivism utilized in tandem with humanism can be potentially transformative. Therefore, understanding the theoretical underpinnings of constructivism is essential, especially when working with beginning teachers who are learning the art of teaching. The theories espoused by the following theorists, all played a role in the foundation of constructivism.

John Dewey’s (1938) concern with interaction, reflection, and experience was reflected in his belief that a child must be actively and directly involved in his/her education. He also believed that all experience was not educative. In fact experiences could be mis-educative if they were static, if they did not contribute to students’ growth, or did not lead students to understand or appreciate later experience. Dewey believed that traditional education offered

many examples of this type of learning environment. Dewey believed that by providing better experiences, progressive education could provide students with better preparation for lifetime appreciation, independence, and development. However, he was also clear that progressive education, when it is done right, is not simple.

Dewey was an advocate for hands-on learning or experiential education, which he believed was essential if a child was to understand his/her actual experience. His belief that the child must be an active learner engaging in the world is one of the foundations of constructivism. In constructivist theory learners construct knowledge for themselves (Grennon Brooks & Brooks, 1993). There is no such thing as knowledge "out there" independent of the knower, but only knowledge we construct for ourselves as we move through our developmental stages which leads us to the developmental psychologist Jean Piaget.

Piaget was a psychologist with a biological orientation. He was regarded as a developmental theory epistemologist who regarded empirical studies of infants, children, and adolescents as an essential source of information about the nature of knowledge. Piaget's (1952) stage theory of cognitive development examined the developmental change that a child passes through on his/her way from birth to adulthood. Unlike cognitivism, "cognitive-development perspectives do not address the acquisition of knowledge or specific skills. Instead, they focus on the formation of the highest levels of human thinking, describing the events and conditions necessary to

attain these levels” (Gredler, 2009, p. 263). Piaget viewed the mind as an active set of cognitive structures that help us make sense of what we perceive.

According to Piaget, these structures grow in intellectual complexity as we mature and as we interact with the world we come to know and as we gain experience. Through maturation and experience, the groundwork for new structures is laid. Piaget’s claim was that “intelligence and knowledge are not static quantities or things. Instead, knowing is a process; it develops through the individual’s adaptation to the environment, and it is ever-changing” (Gredler, p. 266). This differed from a traditional view of knowledge that saw knowledge as something that was “out there” in objects and events and consisted of static objective information. Therefore, in a traditional setting, the individual and external environment could be separated into two entities. However, in Piaget’s counterintuitive view the process of developing new knowledge, the individual, and the environment could not be separated.

Piaget (1952) described a model of how the mind processes information in four distinct stages: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete, and formal. He believed that “real cognitive growth only occurs when children construct[ed] their own knowledge. Children need[ed] opportunities to figure things out on their own” (Crain, 2000, p. 137). In Piaget’s work:

Knowledge is the process of knowing through interactions with the environment, and intelligence is an organized system that constructs the

structures it needs in adapting to the environment. Therefore, intelligence is an ongoing and changing process, and the activity of the learner creates the process of knowing. (cited in Gredler, 2009, p. 269)

On the whole, Piaget viewed constructivism “as a way of explaining how people come to know about their world” (Grennon Brooks & Brooks, 1993, p. 26). Along with Piaget, Vygotsky (1978) focused his work on cognitive development—the development of thinking. The main difference between Piaget and Vygotsky’s learning theories was Piaget (1952) believed that children act on the environment to learn and Vygotsky believed that children learn through social interactions and their culture which leads us to his social development theory.

Vygotsky’s (1978) social development theory was also one of the foundations of constructivism. His theory recognized that social interaction played a role in the process of cognitive development, with a “more knowledgeable other” guiding the student and moving him/her through the “zone of proximal development.” Vygotsky defined the zone of proximal development as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). Another way of explaining it is that “it is an account of how the more competent assist the young and the less competent to reach that higher ground, ground from which to reflect more abstractly about the nature of things” (Bruner, 1986, p. 73). Piaget (1952)



differed from Vygotsky on this point. He believed a child could only perform inside one of the developmental stages whereas, Vygotsky believed that given proper help and assistance, children could perform a problem outside a their range of understanding.

Vygotsky's (1978) theory focused on connections between people and the sociocultural context in which they act and interact in shared experiences. He found that what was "essential in the development of higher mental functions [were] interactions with knowledgeable adults to develop both the meanings of cultural symbols and the ways of thinking of the culture" (Gredler, 2009, p. 341). Piaget differed from Vygotsky on this point as well since Piaget (1952) advocated for discovery learning with little teacher intervention whereas Vygotsky promoted guided discovery in the classroom. Vygotsky saw "language as embodying cultural history" (Bruner, 1986, p. 143). His focus on the development of meaning identifies Vygotsky as a constructivist.

Both Piaget and Vygotsky provided educators with important views on cognitive development in the child. Piaget (1952) proposed that children progress through the stages of cognitive development through maturation, discovery methods, and some social transmissions through assimilation and accommodation (Woolfolk, 2004). Vygotsky's (1978) theory stressed the importance of culture and language on one's cognitive development.

Jerome Bruner was yet another constructivist theorist. His early career was in the traditional paradigm of learning, but in his 1967 book *On Knowing: Essays for the Left Hand*, he published these "fugitive" essays where he was

questioning a “literary” approach to research rather than his positivistic “systematic” approach (Bruner, 1986, p. 8). In the mid-‘70s “the social sciences had moved away from their traditional positivist stance toward a more interpretive posture: meaning became the central focus” (Bruner, 1986, p. 8). In this time period two modes of thought emerged for Bruner: first the paradigmatic mode which “leads to good theory, tight analysis, logical proof, sound argument, and empirical discovery guided by reasoned hypothesis” (Bruner, 1986, p. 13). On the other hand the narrative mode dealt with “human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course. It [strive] to put its timeless miracle into the particulars of experience, and to locate the experience in time and place” (Bruner, 1986, p. 13). As Bruner transcended his positivist approach to research, his thinking around the teaching and learning process broadened.

Bruner’s (1967) discovery learning theory is where the learner draws on his or her own past experience and existing knowledge to discover facts and relationships and new truths to be learned. Discovery learning is an inquiry-based, constructivist learning theory that takes place in problem solving situations where the learner draws on his/her own past experience and existing knowledge to discover facts and relationships and new truths to be learned. Students interact with the world by exploring and manipulating objects, wrestling with questions and controversies, or performing experiments. As a result, students may be more likely to remember concepts and knowledge discovered on their own in contrast to a transmission approach to teaching and

learning. Bruner's theory provided a tailored learning experience for the student, encouraging him/her to develop his/her strengths and weaknesses.

Dewey's, Piaget's, Vygotsky's, and Bruner's learning theories share the same fundamental belief that children need guided opportunities to experience their own world, reflect upon that engagement, and construct their own knowledge. Sternberg's (1997) successful intelligence and experiential learning opportunities are strategies that, when implemented skillfully, can potentially provide a transformational opportunity when "liberation, fluidity and flexibility, movement and freshness, destruction and creation" (Hart, 2009, p. 158) are emphasized. Students immersed in this ongoing process may perhaps move closer to self-actualizing.

The way that I have chosen to story and share my life has greatly influenced how I understand myself in relation to my teaching practice and my students. I storied myself as an unintelligent student/learner. As I restoried my lived experiences, I retold them, relived them, recreated them, and reconstructed them (Randall, 1995). In essence my identity has changed and shifted; I no longer self-identify as an unintelligent student/learner. Each time I have written about my struggles or shared my story as an unintelligent student/learner I reauthored my life (White & Epston, 1990) and I have deepened my understanding of the foundational concepts that have helped to inform my identity. I now understand that I was not taught and assessed in a way that enabled me to learn and in a way that could have optimized my abilities. If the teachers I encountered had utilized a constructivist approach I

might have been able to build on my existing academic strengths, identify my academic weaknesses and with their guidance find ways to compensate for them.

In the locale of a formal educational setting I discussed the notion of intelligence and what it meant to be intelligent based initially on my lived experiences as an unintelligent student/learner. However, I wrote about my experiences in the present in the locale of a university where I am an instructor of beginning teachers. As I worked through this phase of the analysis I came to the realization that throughout my entire career as an elementary teacher I taught my own students primarily utilizing a constructivist teaching approach, and shunned using a more structured, traditional approach. My teaching and learning practice was incomplete.

Today, when teaching Foundational Methods to beginning teachers I openly share my story as a perceived unintelligent student/learner and demonstrate the versatile teaching and learning strategies that differentiated instruction can provide. Differentiated instruction originated in Vygotsky's (1978) social developmental theory whereby a student, with the help of an experienced guide, can move along his/her zone of proximal development. With assistance the student can resolve a problem that they could not have resolved alone and move on to another level of knowledge. By providing assistance the teacher can accelerate a student's cognitive development and provide specific interventions known as "scaffolding" to move a student along the developmental continuum (Education for All, 2005). By providing

beginning teachers with this type of information, it is my hope that this will provide them with the means to meet the needs of most students so that a learner like myself will not fall through the cracks.

After realizing that my teaching practice was incomplete, and one sided, I recognized that I needed to be more aware of the learners who required a more traditional and more structured approach in order for them to learn. This realization opened the door for me to present my epistemology to my teacher candidates in such a way that my narrow constructivist/humanist approach is openly shared from the outset. Today my goal is to establish an awareness of the various learning paradigms available for implementation and then have the teacher candidates analyze which theories they are naturally drawn to. From this point, they can own their biases and make informed pedagogical decisions based on their own self-realizations. By openly sharing my story and my biases, I have made the assumption that the teacher candidates, too, are perhaps starting to make connections between their own story and the identities they have constructed about themselves. As they reflect upon connections they may take action that will allow them to make informed decisions about how to meet the needs of their future students in relation to who they are.

The more I continue to rewrite my unintelligent student/learner story through various lenses: academic, practical, and theoretical, the more distant my dominant story has become. "We are always negotiating various locales; the ideal articulation of place and event recedes before us" (Probyn, 1990, p. 179). A new narrative identity has emerged. In addition, the experience of restorying

itself has had an impact on my identity. I am continually revising my inner story of self in an ongoing effort to achieve coherence and stability in my personal identity (Barresi, 2006). This constant striving to achieve a balanced state keeps me actively engaged in finding ways to improve my teaching and learning practice. According to Kincheloe (2005), an approach to

pedagogy and teacher education that encourages practitioners to construct their own self-knowledge while developing strategies to help students do the same...understands that the development of self-knowledge, an understanding of the social construction of self is a key purpose of a rigorous and critical education. (p. 161)

Sharing various personal identity stories is one way of guiding students to examine their own lived experiences. When we examine our life stories it is “an attempt to understand how people make sense of their lives and give meaning and coherence to them” (Kroger, 2007, p. 23). When I show my vulnerability as an unintelligent student, I open the door for others to share their story, whatever their story may be. When I make a storied connection with beginning teachers I believe that we both have the potential to come to a deeper self-understanding. Coming to a deeper self-understanding is the key to help us “move beyond our present state of being – our ontological selves – as we discern the forces that have made us that way” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 162). Since I teach who I am (Palmer, 1998), by developing my ontological self I now have the opportunity to improve my practice, and by encouraging beginning teachers

to examine who they are perhaps they too will have an opportunity to improve their practice as well.

### *Athlete/Teacher*

Through Probyn's (1990) notion of locale my lived experiences as an athlete can be viewed as embodied events where the athletic event provided a space where I explored the self in relation to the physical challenges I faced. I have played sports both competitively and recreationally my entire life, but ironically, it was through the writing of this dissertation that I have been able to (re)self-identify as an athlete. I chose to label this section *Athlete/Teacher* since I am not specifically writing about my athletic career, but rather I am writing about the influence of my athletic background on my teaching practice.

McAdams (1996) views the *I* as the process of creating a self through the experience of narrating, whereas the *me* is defined as the product that the *I* constructs. Shortly into my teaching career, I shifted roles from being a physical and health education teacher to becoming a core subject teacher, and in doing so I moved locales. According to Probyn (1990), "we are always negotiating various locales" (p. 179), and as I negotiated the various locales I inhabited I also deconstructed my movement between them and have attempted to make meaning from each experience. As I moved from the gym to a classroom, I consciously tried to downplay my identity as an athlete. The change in locale allowed me to change my identity construction.

I remember the day I made the decision to throw out all my t-shirts that made reference to athletics, whether it was supporting a team or referencing an

athletic brand. I gradually started replacing athletic t-shirts with t-shirts that reflected literary personas such as Jane Austen, William Shakespeare, Stephen Leacock, Thoreau and so forth. My *me* identity was shifting, and I chose to advertise this through an exterior billboard. The *me* is termed a self-concept and is an evolving collection of self-attributions such as personality traits, concerns, and stories (Kroger, 2007). My concern was that I would not be taken seriously as a core subject teacher after being a physical education teacher for years. The message I was trying to convey to my students was, "Here, look, I read Austen, Shakespeare, Shaw, Leacock, and Thoreau. I am smart and not a dumb jock!" My identity as a core teacher was in confusion.

In *Doors*, I wrote about how my athletic prowess gained my entrance into the academic door to complete both my Bachelor of Physical and Health Education (B.P.H.E.) and my Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degrees. I felt like I did not deserve to be in a university setting from an academic standpoint but that it was solely my athletic ability that pried open my entrance into the academic world. Again, it was the *me* that made me feel that I had snuck in through the back door. I felt like a fraud. Was I experiencing the "imposter phenomenon" (Clance & Imes, 1978), a term that described a sample of more than 150 high-achieving women? This phenomenon, also known as the "imposter syndrome" or "impostership" (Brookfield, 2006), is a feeling of inadequacy and is partly defined as "the persistent belief in one's lack of competence, skill or intelligence in the face of consistent objective data to the contrary" (Wick, 1997).



My story is different from the sample in the Clance and Imes (1978) study. The women in their study came from high achieving academic backgrounds with a plethora of professional accomplishments already under their belt, yet these women still felt that they were not bright and that they had fooled anyone who thought otherwise. My feelings of impostership began as a struggling student in school when I developed an awareness of “the distance between the idealized images of omniscient intellectuals” and myself as a “stumbling and struggling survivor” (Brookfield, 2006, p. 77). My accomplishments were physical achievements earned in the locale of an athletic arena. They were not academic or professional in nature, and my *me* did not let me witness the value in my athletic pursuits. My struggles with feeling unintelligent were rooted in the fact that I had not proven myself intellectually as compared to the women in the study who already had proven themselves in an intellectual arena. I was moving from being a successful athlete to navigating the intellectual waters in a university setting. However, that being clarified, I still personified many of the indicators of the imposter syndrome, such as attributing success solely to hard work, downplaying any success I achieved, and living under the family label of being the “athletic” member of the family (Clance & Imes).

Today I still adhere to the mantra of hard work, but my understanding of what it means to work hard in relation to intelligence has shifted. Hard work, for example, may have brought a piece of writing, a project, and/or a dissertation to name just a few, to completion. But what was essential in the

process was that a correct learning path was selected so that I could gain knowledge and then apply that knowledge in a new situation, and last, throughout the process I practiced the attitudes, beliefs, and actions that I expect from another human being.

In Drake and Burns's (2004) *Meeting Standards Through Integrated Curriculum*, the KNOW/DO/BE (KDB) framework for integrating curriculum follows this line of reasoning. The original framework took the shape of a triangle with KNOW—the knowledge a teacher wanted students to understand, such as concepts and generalizations, at the base of the triangle, taking up the most space. The narrower middle portion of the triangle housed DO—how a teacher wanted students to learn, using broad-based interdisciplinary skills. Last, the smallest portion of the triangle was BE at the top—reflecting how a teacher wanted students to be, which includes “attitudes, beliefs, and actions that we expect students to demonstrate” (p. 33).

The next version of the framework, included in the same book, takes the shape of a bridge with KNOW and DO adhering to the same-sized triangular shapes holding up the BE bridge. The bridge connects the two concepts, intimating that how a teacher wanted a student to BE should be present throughout the process of what the teacher wanted them to KNOW and what a teacher wanted them to DO. In her latest book, Drake (2007) has evolved her framework to include an umbrella that explicitly links the BE to the KNOW and DO. The decisions a teacher makes about how s/he will execute his/her teaching and learning environment has an impact on a student's performance,

and how a student performs greatly impacts how s/he views him/herself as a learner. It is my hope that the high achieving students I work with will see themselves as capable student/learners and not as young men and women who carry the weight of the imposter syndrome or impostership. By redefining intelligence, my teaching and learning practice has begun to shift and change, but what I cannot change is the athletic path that guided me here into this profession.

My identity as an athlete was and is the foundation of who I am, and sport allowed me to hone the foundational skills that gave me access to completing my university degrees. But how I learned the content I required in order to move forward towards self-actualization has been an important aspect to consider in order to both understand how my epistemological beliefs were formed and how this knowledge has informed my present teaching and learning practice.

According to Kroger (2007) "identity resides in the binding together of the *I* and the *me*. The life story portrays the characteristic ways in which the *I* arranges elements of the *me* into a temporal sequence having a setting, plot, and characters" (p. 23). Understanding my life story through narratives and how I have integrated the lived experiences I chose to write about, rather than understanding isolated values, accomplishments, or other personality features, allowed my various identities to emerge. Understanding how my athletic identity emerged, receded, and reemerged in my teaching and learning practice has allowed me to interpret my personae in the locale of both the athletic arena

and the classroom and assist me in understanding how my identity as an athlete helped to develop into the person I am today. According to Probyn (1990), “in recognizing a locale we see both the regulation of practices and why those practices in themselves might also be the source of mixed pleasures” (p. 182). Therefore, being cognizant of my identity as an athlete teaching in a classroom assisted me in sorting through the stereotypical constructs that exist by appearance alone. In fact being a strong, fit person may have played an influential role in my success.

Being a muscular athlete who portrayed female masculinities (Halberstam, 1998) may have played a role in my academic success. In *Built to Win*, Heywood and Dworkin (2003) argued that women who are experiencing their athletic bodies as powerful are rejecting notions of passivity in other parts of their lives as well. This is what I believe may have occurred in my life. As an athlete competing in team sports and culminating in a career as an individual tri-sport athlete, I participated in full distance triathlons that took on average 11 hours to complete. My powerful body was capable of withstanding much pain and suffering. I often self-referenced those painful Ironman triathlon moments when working through adversity in other areas of my teaching and academic lives. I sought strength from my past-embodied lived experiences and attempted to reject any doubts I had about my present situation.

One of the tenets of endurance sport was to conquer the mental aspect. There was a continuous tension that played out between mind and body. The challenge for me was to overcome the physical discomfort. I won some

physical and mental tests and lost many, but the one thing that remained constant was that in all my experiences, regardless of the outcome, I always pondered the lesson to be learned.

Ontologically, I view my life from a humanist perspective. I am engaged in a journey towards self-actualization where there are no distinct endings but rather a series of layered lived experiences. I see myself in a continuing spiral of experiences, each one informing future experiences and reinforcing past experiences while reflecting upon the engagement in the present. As Bruner (2003) states:

We constantly construct and reconstruct a self to meet the needs of the situations we encounter and do so with guidance of our memories of the past and our hopes and fears for the future. Telling oneself about oneself is rather like making up a story about who and what we are, what has happened, and why we are doing what we are doing. (p. 210)

At the beginning of this dissertation I was convinced that teaching saved my soul as I desperately tried to be recognized for something other than being an athlete. I now understand that I was trying to negate my identity as an athlete with the hope of shaking off the dumb jock syndrome story I had constructed for myself. As I continued to interpret and analyze the data, the notion of being an athlete and what that meant kept cropping up. The recent reconnection with my athletic self, specifically the lessons I learned from my athletic endeavours, has given me a new outlook on both my teaching and my academic lives.

The lessons I learned in the athletic arena or locale, and which I transferred to the teaching and academic locales, were the ability to fail gracefully, congratulate my challenger, to persevere through the tough times, to learn to take constructive criticism, to continually strive to improve, to accept accolades, and last to learn to live through the unique tensions that arise when a person deliberately works at improving herself. These are the BE attributes from Drake's (2007) KDB framework: the attitudes, beliefs, and actions I hope people express in their day-to-day interactions, whether they are demonstrated in a classroom or not. It was the bridge or umbrella connecting the KNOW and the DO that was essential in making that connection with what is already there. Being an athlete allowed me to make connections between my teacher/learner and academic/learner identities in a subtle but essential way.

My limitations and strengths have been tested in an athletic arena, in a classroom, and now in an academic setting. I have come to realize that the lessons I learned as an athlete created the many opportunities I have had in my life. My core humanist perspective of working toward self-actualizing has guided me through my various identities. When I tried to negate my athletic self, as I shifted from physical education teacher to core teacher, I was negating the part of my self that has been foundational in my achievements to date. However, being an athlete is only one part of my teacher identity—I am also a learner.

### *Teacher/Learner*

When I entered the teaching profession, I wanted to become a competent teacher and teach students beyond the curriculum expectations but also addressing their social and emotional needs. In my first job interview, when applying for a Girls' Physical and Health Education position, I was asked what my philosophy of teaching physical education was. I shared my belief in promoting healthy, active living as a way of life and that I did not focus on competition during games but rather low organizational games that encouraged participation from all students and not just the best athletes. As luck would have it, my philosophy resonated with the principal's, and I was hired. However, this story could have played out very differently.

As my career progressed I worked for many principals, but one man in particular had a focused philosophy, which was win at all cost. I suspect if he had been the principal interviewing me for my first job, I would not have been hired. This story is an example of how my identity and my personal philosophy as an athlete move in and out of a particular locale; in this instance the locale is from school to school. However, when I worked in whatever locale I was situated, I always attempted to move the discussion from a win at all cost philosophy, where usually only an elite few would benefit, to one of holism where the basic principles are "balance,...inclusion, and connection" (J. P. Miller, 2007, p. 14).

It is quite possible that my identity as a holistic teacher practitioner was already a part of my ontology before I started teaching. Holism is "based on the

‘perennial philosophy’ which holds that all things are part of an indivisible unity or whole” (J. P. Miller, 1996, p. 20). It is a theory that asserts that “*everything* exists in relationship, in a context of connection and meaning – and that any change or event causes a realignment, however slight, throughout the entire pattern” (p. 21). This was the philosophy I was exposed to as a young child growing up. My family lived the basic principles of holism through what J. P. Miller (2007) outlines as key components of holism. In my family, process was accentuated, my imagination was stimulated, intuition was valued, the arts were promoted, a vision of the whole person was taken into account, learning was regarded with greater respect over evaluation, and finally, inclusivity was an essential component of becoming a balanced individual where inclusion and connection are accentuated. The experiential learning experiences I wrote about in my collection of narratives and subsequently interpreted in the Hermeneutic Interlude was lived in a context of connection and meaning. The knowledge I gained from learning in this context was deep and enduring. It was in fact transformational.

By the time I started teaching I believed that everything existed in relationship and that in turn the relationships I developed with my students could potentially transform our lives. “A holistic perspective is concerned with the quality of human relationships within a community” (R. Miller, 2000, p. 25). I strove to form a caring, open, and honest classroom community that aimed for “a more intensive, more genuine interaction between people” (Miller, p. 25), and this required me to take into account the whole person including the



intellectual, emotional/affective, physical, social, aesthetic, and spiritual elements of another human being (Miller). As a holistic teacher, when taking into account more than the intellectual capacities of a student I acknowledge “that each human being is a complex, interrelated system of abilities, potentials and creative energies” (Miller, p. 24) and not a person who can be reduced to a test score or a reductionist label such as “at risk” or “learning disabled.” So what have I learned as a teacher/learner?

I knew that I wanted to participate in a teaching and learning process that would encourage students to want to become, or be, the best they could be based on their own individual ability level, which reflected Sternberg’s (1997) successful intelligence theory. I strove to foster the belief that any person, female or male, could achieve any goal s/he set out to work towards in and out of our classroom. I wanted the students I worked with to believe that they could make a difference in the world, since I truly believe that one person can make a difference in the world. The principles that holistic education is based on: balance, inclusion, and connection foster this belief. According to R. Miller (2000):

Holism asserts that *everything* exists in relationship, in a context of connection and meaning—and that any change or event causes a realignment, however slight, throughout the entire pattern. ‘The whole is greater than the sum of its parts’ means that the whole is comprised of a *pattern of relationships* that are not contained by the parts but ultimately define them. (p. 21)

By tending to not only the intellectual capacities of the learner, I was also paying attention to the student's emotional or affective well being, physical well being, social, and spiritual well being. By balancing these elements and being as inclusive as I possibly could I was continually attempting to connect the complex, interrelated system of abilities, potentials, and creative energies at the level of the individual student.

I learned that if I engaged students in learning that extended beyond simply knowledge-based learning and promoted learning that seeped into their emotional capacities and was felt at a physical level where the body was capable of expressing tacit knowledge, perhaps their learning would impact society in some way and interrupt modern society's dominant values. Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated cognitive approach, where situated knowledge is an example of understanding in context, was an approach that engaged students in a social context and guided them towards meaningful interaction with others that could potentially disrupt the status quo. Approaching learning through one's imagination and creativity drawing on authentic or situated experiences gave students the opportunities to approach problems in a way that inspired innovative solutions. In addition to authentic tasks, if I engaged students spiritually, meaning "recognizing that there is a part of every person that is 'immutable and mysterious' – an inner core that lies beyond the physical, social, and other sources of personality" (R. Miller, 2000, p. 24), then perhaps they would develop their intrapersonal capacity.

Situated cognition, more specifically situated knowledge, also embodies the tenets of holism as it “indicates more than conceptual understanding; it represents a repertoire of important incidents paired with personal meanings, beliefs, and know-how within certain contexts and cultures” (Kim & Hannafin, 2008, p. 1838). It can represent the belief system and identity of the user within a given culture where meaning making and the identity are central to representing the scope of human knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Understanding the stories I tell is important for me as a teacher educator. According to Murphy, Pinnegar, and Pinnegar (2008), “most of us carry stories, usually hidden from others, but it is these stories that guide us in the ethical actions and obligations we assume in our lives as teachers and teacher educators” (p. 249). Exposing some of my stories has led me to explore the learning theories I embraced and utilized in the classroom and has guided me to delve into the theorists who developed these theories and understand the context by which they were developed. This process has opened the door for me to improve my practice if I take action.

The experiences I have unveiled through my collection of narratives have guided my actions as a teacher/learner and caused me to reflect upon those experiences. Reflection is an active process of weaving the lived experiences I have written about with how these experiences have impacted my teaching and learning practice. Reflecting on past experiences and their consequences informed my understanding, and I know my future actions will grow out of this understanding. This is the space where I can either improve my practice or not

improve my practice; the choice is mine. I need to decide whether it will be worthwhile for me to guide teacher candidates through the process I have just undergone. Will an exploration of one's lived experiences and the themes that emerge make a difference in that person's future teaching and learning practice? According to Van Manen (1991),

how I am as a teacher depends on what I do, on my possibilities for acting thoughtfully. But my possible actions do not magically arise, they depend on the thoughtfulness that I have been able to acquire in recollective reflection. (p. 116)

I believe that acting thoughtfully through focused reflection will guide my decision.

According to my first Teacher Appraisal, I epitomized Schön's (1983) reflective practitioner. My identity as a teacher/learner was inextricably entwined with my inherent disposition to reflect. By incorporating Schön's reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action into my teaching and learning practice, I was in a constant state of interpretation and action as I continually analyzed my teaching. Today as a university lecturer, I have continued to use reflection; but now it is "aimed at exploring the reasoning and attitudes which underlie human action, and producing more effective learning in organizations and other social systems" (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994, p. 237). My energy is more focused towards reflecting on the significant decisions I have made in the past with regards to the learning paradigms I am in alignment with, humanism and constructivism, and the learning theories I have

embraced and utilized, successful intelligence, experiential learning, and situated cognition. In addition, my energy is also focused on reflecting on the significant decisions I will make in the future.

Part of what I learned in the locale of a teacher as learner is that certain learning theories lend themselves naturally to a philosophy of holism. Successful intelligence (Sternberg, 1997) and situated cognition (Lave & Wenger, 1991) are two theories that allow for a holistic approach to flourish in the classroom. Both theories fall under the constructivist paradigm and require focused, deliberate reflection in order to be implemented successfully. The stories I wrote in my collection of narratives led me to explore what my theoretical foundation was and where it originated. This helped me to realize that holism not only guides my teaching practice, but it guides my life as well.

### **Location**

In the final phase of this analysis I use the metaphor of location as “the epistemological process that renders the local and locale knowable” (Jewett, 2008, p. 23). Put another way, it is through the emergent theme of embodied learning (location) that I render learning experientially (local) and the various identities I inhabit (locale) knowable. Location is “that process which determines what we experience as knowledge and what we know as experience” (Probyn, 1990, p. 184).

Location is a metaphor that is all encompassing. It is not as specific and static as local and not as varied as locale. Rather, location allowed me to take what I suggested as themes, experiential learning in the local, and identity in the

locale, and reveal another layer that seeped into both the local and the locale, which crystallized the two themes and made them knowable and that is embodiment.

The third emergent theme of embodied learning was difficult for me to elucidate. However, coming across the metaphor of locatedness in Jewett's (2008) work and then going to the source, Probyn's (1990) *Travels in the postmodern: Making Sense of the Local*, provided the framework for me to connect the themes. At the outset I pondered whether the metaphor of locatedness would work by manipulating the three emergent themes and playing with the specific metaphors of local, locale, and location to see if the themes could be further interpreted and understood using this metaphor. Each level of the metaphor, local, locale, and location, could be seen in three ways:

1. As a whole under the umbrella locatedness,
2. As part of a whole as independent metaphors, and
3. As a complex interweaving of locatedness.

In addition, each level could be described in terms of their similarities to one another or for their unique characteristics. For example, when I think of local, locale, and location I think of discovering where something is situated. Where is experience located was the question I posed at the outset of this analysis. Is it experienced in the local, locale, location, or all three? This is viewing locatedness as a whole and focusing on the similarities of the three.

When I attempted to delineate local, locale, and location in each level of the analysis thus far, I emphasized their unique characteristics. The local was

stitched into place and time. The locale “link[ed], but [did] not collapse, place and event in order to explore spatial and discursive practices, highlighting contradictions” (Jewett, 2008, p. 21), and finally, location allowed for the local and the locale to become knowable.

Last, local, locale, and location could be utilized as a complex weaving of locatedness, and this is where I believe location and embodied learning come together. Embodied learning in terms of location provided a place for my various identities to reside and experiential learning to flourish. All three levels of the metaphor became a complex weaving of locatedness.

When Luce-Kapler (2004) was engaged in examining the life of Emily Carr, she came across many references in Carr’s journals where Carr had written about going into the woods and sitting “waiting for the thrum of the forest to begin” and then “painted the cadences of such places” (p. 35). As Luce-Kapler describes:

As I “followed” her trail of cigarette smoke and the dribbles of paint across her studio floor, my understanding of the complexity of her life and relations began to unfold like the sweep of her brush across canvas. I came to know her more intensely than I could have imagined. This embodied knowing was a process of composing by juxtaposing my life to Emily’s, by continuing a dialogue that created new images of my life and hers, and by reconciling how deeply interwoven our lives became through the rhythm of texts: paintings, stories and poems. (p. 35)

Embodied learning and knowing is complex. It potentially allows a person to have a more layered, and therefore more intense learning experience, as did Luce-Kapler in her investigation of Emily Carr. The learning experience tended to linger and become one with a person's being. It takes a person beyond their current form. It transforms him/her (Hart, 2009). I imagine that is why I chose to write about my experience in Mr. Fritz's grade 8 History class. In his class I was given the opportunity, while working in a group, to dramatize the hanging of Louis Riel. That historical moment became engrained in my body and in my being. I came to know Louis Riel much the same way Luce-Kapler came to know Emily Carr. He was etched in my body. As Hart reminds us:

The dynamic of personal transformation creates energy that often catalyzes growth extending beyond the individual. Interdependence at all levels reminds us that social structures (e.g., slavery), cultural beliefs or values (e.g., prejudice), and consciousness of the universe as a whole may be changed as the ripple of individual transformation grows to a wave. (p. 158)

In this example the local, my experiential learning opportunity while in the locale of identifying as an unintelligent student/learner, opened the door for me to have an intense transformational learning experience where the location of the knowledge I was exposed to became embodied. This knowledge has rippled into many aspects of my life. My understanding of the injustice the Aboriginal community was made to endure (and continues to endure) had a



profound effect on my teaching and learning practice. The Aboriginals' respect for the earth has guided my actions and how I interact with the natural world. What I learned in Mr. Fritz's history class went way beyond factual knowledge. The experience of dramatizing this historic moment in Canadian history transformed my way of being in the world. This is a complex weaving of locatedness.

According to Davis et al. (2000), "an implication of this conception of knowing bodies is that phenomena such as personal cognition, collective knowledge, and social interaction are tightly interrelated" (p. 57). In my grade 8 History example, embodiment resulted from the personal knowledge I gained from learning about how the Canadian west was opened up, from the collective knowledge I gained from other dramatizations, and from the social interaction I experienced within my own working group. During the learning experience I did not feel unintelligent, which leads me to believe that embodied learning is a necessary requirement for me to learn. When exposed to experiential learning I was able to undergo an intense experience and gain personal knowledge and an understanding of that piece of Canadian history. In essence, the local and the locale became knowable in the location of my body.

The more experiential learning opportunities I was exposed to, the more opportunities I had to experience embodied learning. Piaget argued that "learning is a continuous process of updating one's sense of the world as prompted by new experiences. The learner is constantly construing and reconstruing in an effort to maintain a coherent system of interpretation" (cited

in Davis et al., 2000, p. 100). Each new learning experience I underwent gave me the chance to construct knowledge and potentially experience embodiment. As a matter of fact, my “entire history of experience and interpretation contribute[d] to the manner in which a new event [was] understood” (Davis et al., p. 100). As I interpreted my collection of stories, my entire history of lived experiences was underlying my ability to make meaning. According to Davis et al.), “individual learning is not a brain-based phenomenon, but an ongoing process of embodying one’s history. For this reason, bodily action is not seen as a demonstration of internalized understandings; rather bodily action *is* understanding” (pp. 100-101). For me, learning happens in the body; bodily action is understanding. I do not know whether this is a unique way to learn, but I know it is the way I learn. The few teachers who provided transformational learning opportunities for me were meeting my needs as a learner. Since I had minimal contact with teachers who taught with a child who learns with her body in mind, this begs the question, how do I meet the needs of students who also learn through embodied knowing? Better yet, how can I create an atmosphere that invites my teacher candidates, even nudges them, to meet the needs of a young person, male or female, who learns through his/her body?

Today, cognitivism continues to be the most common learning paradigm; therefore, students who learn in a traditional linguistic/mathematical way will likely have their learning needs met. If I am to improve my practice, one of the enhancements I need to make is to expose teacher candidates to

concrete ways of using constructivist and humanist learning theories. If I am to improve my practice I also need to explicitly guide my teacher candidates to examine their epistemology and ontology so that they can deepen their understanding of how they know and how they are in the world, the *Be* (Drake, 2007). This in turn will provide them with the information they need to make informed decisions that will guide them to create the best teaching practice for themselves and their students.

According to Jewett (2008), the level of abstraction between the terms local, locale, and location can provide us with an “interpretive intersection, where considerations of local practice rub up against epistemological questions about how such knowing is done, or can be done” (p. 21). Through the metaphor of locatedness I explored the themes experiential learning, identity, and embodied learning which emerged from the collection of narratives and the subsequent Hermeneutic Interludes. As a result of this interrogation I have acquired a broader and deeper understanding of the various learning paradigms, coming to a new understanding of how knowing is done and can be done. The interrogation using the metaphor of locatedness has challenged my existing values and brought me to a deeper understanding of how my identities as an unintelligent student/learner, athlete/teacher, teacher/learner, and academic have impacted my own practice. In the end my deepest desire is that what emerged out of this examination will ultimately assist me in meeting the needs of the teacher candidates I work with. By encouraging them to explore their own identities they may begin to challenge their existing values, which will perhaps

create an awareness about the learners they will rub up against and in turn allow them to meet their students' diverse needs.

To reiterate how I have framed the discussion thus far, using the metaphor local, referring to a time and place that cannot be changed, I discussed experiential learning as an emergent theme that permeated my informal learning experiences at home. As well I described some successful implementations of this strategy when I was a student/learner in a formal educational setting. Next, I used locale to engage in a discursive and nondiscursive arrangement where I attempted to make sense of and articulate both place and event in relation to the identities I acknowledged as emergent themes. Last, I used the metaphor of location as the epistemological process that renders the local and locale knowable, and in this discussion embodiment allowed me to understand how experiential learning informed my various identities. In Chapter Five, I will continue to use the metaphor of locatedness coupled with Drake's (2007) KNOW/DO/BE (KDB) framework and offer descriptions of learning activities grounded in the pedagogical theories, examples of teacher and student work and its relation to related theories, teaching techniques/strategies that expand the knowledge base of how methods should be taught, and describe how a teacher could BE while delivering an educational Foundational Methods course at the university level.

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE LEARNING SPACE

*To be there, to be pedagogically present, must begin with being there. This is so simple a statement that it sounds ridiculous in the writing and no doubt also in the reading. But wait, listen for a moment for the possibilities that lie beneath the obvious.* (Hill, 2006, p. 31)

### Overview

Locatedness, specifically local, locale, and location (Probyn, 1990) continues to provide a metaphor that, coupled with Drake's (2007) KNOW/DO/BE (KDB) umbrella, allows me to frame this application/descriptive chapter in terms of what a Foundational Methods learning space at the postsecondary level can look like and what it can feel like for both the instructor and his/her students. This chapter describes learning moments grounded in constructivist and humanist learning theories, specifically but not limited to Sternberg's (1997) successful intelligence. It also provides teaching techniques/strategies that promote this kind of learning space. In addition, this chapter offers examples of student and teacher work as it relates to these learning theories in practice.

To combine Probyn's locatedness with Drake's (2007) KDB framework, I have embedded what I would like students to know in the metaphor of local, "practices which are directly stitched into the place and time which give rise to them" (Probyn, 1990, p. 178) even though I am aware that the knowledge a student may take in will be unique to that individual. Next, what I would like students to do is embedded in the metaphor of locale, a space that "serves to emphasize the lived contradictions of place and event" (Probyn, p. 182). Finally, how I would like students to be is set in the metaphor of location,

which “renders the local and locale knowable” (Jewett, 2008, p. 23). Put another way, what I would like students to know and do will become knowable or made clear in how I envision my students and myself to be while we are engaged in the teaching and learning process together.

### **Local/KNOW**

When teaching in a university setting the teaching schedule and room allocation is thrust upon me, and there is little space for negotiating the time I will teach a course and the venue I will engage students. The Foundational Methods (Methods) course I teach is scheduled on a particular day and is slotted into a specific time slot, one that is out of my control and one that cannot be changed. A second aspect of *being stitched into place and time* is the syllabus. At the beginning of each course I enter into a partnership or contract of learning with my students via the syllabus. The syllabus outlines the curriculum and the assessment and evaluation protocol for the course I am teaching. However, in every skillful or effective teacher’s practice, lecturers need to be aware of their students’ needs, and therefore the contingencies they have outlined, that seem to be stitched into place and time, may need to give way and be shifted and changed in order to open up to something that perhaps may become more meaningful.

Within the local of a university classroom I am entrusted with the responsibility of guiding teacher candidates in the foundations of teaching. The classroom becomes a place and a space to engage learners. Grounding my Methods course within a constructivist framework, one that lives and breathes

through reflection, collaboration, and a humanist engagement, allows me to teach who I am (Palmer, 1998). Moving from “a lecture format to one in which the teacher educator acts as a facilitator in the development of individual and group meaning around classroom teaching” (V. Richardson, 2003, p. 3) is my goal. What I know and what I want students to know comes to life when we construct knowledge together.

*The Syllabus: Story One*

*“We have done this a million times already,” she mutters under her breath, but I sense she wants me to hear her. With her head hanging low and a look of utter frustration and bitterness on her face she continues to doodle on the syllabus outline. Her bright yellow nametag reads Cindy.*

*“Cindy what do you mean ‘we have done this a million times’?” I ask, thinking to myself, she is going to be a handful. I probe for more information, “What part of the syllabus are you specifically referring to?” She immediately looks up from the paper on her desk and goes into a well-rehearsed diatribe. Her tone of voice suggests a “you asked but I don’t think you really want to hear this” attitude. She attacks the redundancy of the education program and everything she has experienced for the last 4 years. I hear a cacophony of voices supporting her rant, and as I look around the room the remainder of the students are nodding their heads in agreement. I am surprised by the articulate nature of her angry outburst and flabbergasted by the unequivocal support of her entire cohort group. This is not a single disenchanted woman I am dealing with, this is an entire disenchanted group. I observe everything I need to know. I look at all the faces and inquire into the make-up of the group, “Okay, let me get this straight, all of you are all in the fifth year education students. There are no 1-year Bachelor of Education students in this class, correct?”*

*In a frustrated tone they respond in a resounding, “Yes!” in unison. It seems that my first day of my first attempt at teaching Foundational Methods to*

*future high school teachers in the Intermediate/Senior, or I/S group as they are affectionately called, is going to be a learning experience.*

*Within minutes of being in the class I ascertain they are not happy with the program, the course outline, with me, and quite possibly their whole educational journey. Without missing a beat I ceremoniously rip up the syllabus and exclaim, "Let's build this thing together!"*

As a constructivist and humanist it is challenging for me to separate what I know from what I would like students to know. In this scenario my immediate concern was that I was responsible for 30 disengaged student/teacher candidates. What I know is that when an individual is disengaged from the content and/or the learning environment it is a challenge for that person to learn; therefore, sharing my knowledge about foundational teaching methods at that moment in time was going to be a monumental challenge for me. When I found myself in front of 30 students who were concerned, upset, and even angry that they were going to be exposed to the same educational content once again, I made a split second decision to offer them an opportunity to have a voice in what they would be learning. Reflection-in-action is at the heart of this scenario. According to Schön (1987):

Reflection-in-action has a critical function...we think critically about the thinking that got us into this fix or this opportunity; and we may, in the process, restructure strategies of action, understandings of phenomena, or ways of framing problems. (p. 28)

In this scenario, I was randomly scheduled to work with an entire class that had 4 years of educational courses behind them, and not scheduled to work with the 1-year Bachelor of Education students in the consecutive program. This group



had unique learning requirements that needed to be addressed in order for them to become engaged learners. According to Brookfield (2006) “there are times when a commitment to behaving in ways that we assume are professional gets in the way of helping students learn” (p. 19). I knew I had to take some form of action and change the learning contract. By offering the concurrent students the opportunity to cowrite a new syllabus, one that would meet their unique needs, I believe I turned what could have been a disempowered experience into an embodied experience. In other words, I made the learning opportunity perceptible by “reclaiming the bodily emotional realms as sources of knowledge” (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 13).

In my opinion, there was an inherent weakness in the syllabus I had inherited from the I/S Methods team in that it did not meet the needs of this particular group of learners. The syllabus did not address this unique groups learning style (they had been together as a cohort for 5 years) and the content was repetitive. In successful intelligence theory (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2004) “people adapt to, shape, and select environments. In adaptation they change themselves to fit the environment” (p. 274). This was what I was modeling in the moment for my students. I was willing to change my agenda in order to adapt and shape my thinking to fit into their environment. In addition, “teaching for successful intelligence attempts to help teachers reach a larger cross-section of students than more traditional teaching methods that emphasize memory and analytical instruction” (Sternberg & Grigorenko, p. 275). By giving this group an opportunity to cowrite the syllabus I engaged more

learners. In doing so, I was grounding my practice in a constructivist pedagogy.

According to V. Richardson (2003):

Constructivist pedagogy is thought of as the creation of classroom environments, activities, and methods that are grounded in a constructivist theory of learning, with goals that focus on individual students developing deep understandings in the subject matter of interest and habits of mind that aid in future learning. (p. 3)

My constructivist and humanist epistemology informed my decision making process. The method of creating a collaborative classroom environment through the coconstruction of the syllabus, and the subsequent activities that emerged, modeled the habits of mind that I wanted my students to experience in a classroom while they were still students but who were in the midst of becoming teachers. I believe Gardner (1983, 1999) and Sternberg (1997) would both endorse my pedagogical approach to teaching and learning.

Using Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences confirmed what I experienced every day as an elementary classroom teacher: Students think and learn in different ways no matter what age they are. I transferred this practical and theoretical knowledge into a beginning teacher's university methods course. With the input of my students we were able to develop a syllabus that outlined a framework for the course while reflecting on an approach that would better meet their needs as concurrent students. This is what Gardner (1999) espoused, an alternative way of thinking for educators who feel out of step with the current, dominant outcome-based and product orientation to curriculum and

educational policy. It was my hope that modeling this broad vision of education while living through an experience of having an instructor who listened to their needs and changed her practice would support a constructivist theory of learning as a lived experience, and perhaps this would inject their future practice.

In addition to Gardner, I believe Sternberg (1985, 1997) would also support my pedagogy. Sternberg (1985) developed an alternative intelligence model that takes into consideration three kinds of intelligence, componential, experiential, and contextual.

- Componential intelligence—focuses on analytical thinking that focuses on planning, monitoring, reflection, and transfer.
- Experiential intelligence—focuses on developing, applying new ideas, and creative solutions, and last
- Contextual intelligence—focuses on selecting and shaping real-world environments and experiences.

I believe I modeled a balance of all three intelligences. This particular group had a solid theoretical foundation that needed to be acknowledged, and by recognizing this I transferred what I knew about students and how they think and learn in different ways no matter what age they are. Next, I not only acknowledged but applied a creative solution to the challenge we faced together, that being that they were a unique group with unique learning requirements. Last, by taking action I shaped a real-world environment,

students in the midst of learning how to become teachers, and together we shared an experience steeped in a contextual moment.

In this example, what I wanted my students to know was embedded in the practical application and authentic task of adjusting a course syllabus to meet the unique needs of a group of students. I accomplished this by offering the group an opportunity to coconstruct the syllabus, our contract for learning. What I hoped they would do was become part of the process, and in fact they did become an instrumental part of the process by cocreating a course of study that met their unique needs. Last, by being a teacher or guide who listened, who was flexible, and who was knowledgeable enough to see the practical value in this constructivist opportunity for beginning teachers, I was modeling the characteristics I hoped they would come to value in their own teaching and learning practice.

#### *The Syllabus: Story Two*

*"Hey haven't seen you in a few weeks, how are your classes?"*

*Kristen, my pre-service colleague inquired.*

*"Pretty well. Most of my students are incredibly enthusiastic!" I replied.*

*"I have an idea for the final assignment I want to run by you. I was thinking instead of a final paper why don't we offer a final project where the students can use Multiple Intelligences and create a final product of their choice reflecting their philosophy of education? They can still do a paper if they want, but this way we can practice what we preach and the students can tap into their unique intelligences."*

*"Oh that is awesome! I love that idea. Yes, I will offer my students this too. Thanks Kristen!" I shouted as I raced away down the hall to my next class*

*on the third floor. My ever-present creative energy was immediately stimulated. I wondered how the students would receive this opportunity.*

*When Kristen suggested this change to the final assignment, I was well into my first year teaching the Primary/Junior/Intermediate (PJI) Methods course. There were several other Methods instructors all teaching the same material. After our brief encounter in the hall we both decided to shift the final course assignment from a compulsory 12-15 page formal academic philosophy of education paper to a choice of a final project/product with an accompanying written process piece. We kept the integrity of the final project/product in that it would still illuminate the student's philosophy of education, but it could now be completed in a variety of ways. The choice of how to create the final product was in the hands of our students. We thought that by incorporating Gardner's (1983) Multiple Intelligences (MI) we would be giving our students, who were preparing to become teachers, authentic opportunities to tap into their own way of interpreting the world. They could draw, paint, dance, sing, write a play, or create a scrapbook, to name just a few of the possibilities. The choice was theirs to make.*

*As I shared this "new" option with my classes I saw their faces light up and their creative juices begin to flow, but I also saw the look of concern on some students' faces.*

*"Can we still write a paper?" a young woman in the first row inquired.*

*"Yes of course you can. One of Gardner's intelligences is linguistic which you are thoroughly familiar with along with his mathematical/logical intelligence. It is not solely artsy and hands-on products that are available for you to choose from," I replied. She seemed relieved.*

*\* \* \* \* \**

*The following week I received a group email where one member of the Methods team thoughtfully made an inquiry into the revised final assignment. She was worried that she had missed a meeting which shifted the final paper to a MI product/project since she had had a number of her own students inquiring as to why they were not given the option to choose how they would complete*

*their final assignment. The blood drained from my face. "Oh yes," I reflected to myself as I rested my right hand on my chin, "I am not in a grade 8 classroom anymore where I work independently, adjusting and refining assignments to meet the needs of my own students. I am on a team of instructors where we are all supposed to carry out the same topic the same week and where the evaluations of assignments are all the same. What do I do now?" I asked myself.*

*I met with Kristen to discuss our change in assignment dilemma and after much consideration we made the decision to follow through with the MI final project/product. We both had already offered this assignment as an option for our students to express their philosophy of education, and since many of them were very excited and had already initiated their final project, we decided to honour this eclectic assignment and not to go back to a paper as the sole final assignment.*

*During our next meeting, Kristen and I discussed the final assignment with the Methods team and unanimously all the instructors decided to offer their students the MI option as a final project/product. No student was denied the choice MI opportunity, and in the end the final products were outstanding. A lot of thought and effort went into synthesizing the theories that grounded each student's philosophy of education, and an additional amount of effort went into painstakingly choosing the appropriate product that would bring his/her philosophy to life. They were a joy to evaluate.*

#### *Epilogue*

*At present we are in our third year of offering the MI assignment. It is now embedded into the syllabus as the final philosophy of education project/product. One of our new instructors evaluated the final MI project/products for the first time and sent the Methods team a copy of a young woman's computer animated philosophy final product that the instructor felt was exemplary. One of the team members responded with a question of whether we could get permission from the student to use her assignment as an exemplar for our Methods course in the coming year. As well, she wondered if*

*it was possible for it to be used in our department since it captures our foundation course to a "T" and is a good reminder of what our program allows for teacher candidates.*

*My coinstructor responded as follows:*

*Good Morning,*

*I called Angie [pseudonym] last night to seek permission for all venues, and she is most agreeable. I even told her she should have it copyrighted! I have so many incredible products but it is the accompanying "process" component that is the "piece de resistance!" If the opportunity became available, it would be wonderful to have Angie along with a select few, share their MI product/process piece with staff. I am sure each of the Methods instructors is having the same experience.*

*On a slightly different note, I am taking the time in each of our classes to share these exemplary works of arts and the accompanying process piece, as it is enlightening for everyone. I have some analogies and metaphors that are absolutely brilliant! Everyone in my classes was required to submit a self-assessed rubric with this assignment. This has turned out to be a valuable tool as it allows me an insight into the individual's frame of reference. The exemplary projects are a meaningful and authentic way for these students to explore a breadth and depth that they may not have considered. These projects also provide "exemplars" of P1 work - something I did not have prior to this year. The saying that a "picture is worth a thousand words" has never been so true.*

*You are so right about these products being uplifting. I am thoroughly enjoying these projects. "Art" the night security guard may not be so enamored with me as I am living there these nights and I can see the "fear" in his eyes that I might miss the 10 p.m. deadline. You will be happy to know that I have not disappointed him. If you get complaints about my rowdiness in the Faculty Lounge, it is because I have felt compelled to share the "WOW" projects with others!*

*(Personal communication, Feb. 12, 2009)*

My practice as a teacher educator is immersed in the process of discovery learning, experiential learning, and providing authentic tasks. This is necessary for deep learning to occur even at a postsecondary level and even when the syllabus is intended to be *stitched into place and time*. This story illustrates my naïveté in thinking that I could adjust the syllabus without

consulting the whole Methods team, and I am embarrassed to say that the thought of conferring with the team never crossed my mind until it was brought up at a meeting. But this story also demonstrates that when I need to I am able to use my professional judgment to make an informed decision. In this story, changing the syllabus midway into the course was a sound decision, one that I ultimately believe improved the Methods course.

As a teacher I love to inject my practice with creative and innovative discovery-based and experiential projects. My decision to continue with the MI final project/product and discard the paper only final assignment was based on theory, practice, and embodiment. My theoretical knowledge of Sternberg's (1997) successful intelligence grounded my decision. My successful practical experience using Gardner's (1983) multiple intelligences in my grade 8 classrooms over the years also guided my decision, and finally, unbeknownst to them, my student teacher candidates also played a role in my decision as well.

Sternberg's triarchic intelligence encourages teacher practitioners to teach and assess achievement in ways that enable students to analyze, create with, and apply their knowledge (Sternberg, Torff, & Grigorenko, 2003). Most groups of students profit from this form of instruction and assessment. The theory of successful intelligence (Sternberg, 1997) stems from the theory of triarchic intelligence. It requires a person to recognize his/her own strengths and make the most of them while at the same time having him/her recognize his/her weaknesses and find ways to correct or compensate for them. Both are important (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2004). The students who benefit most by



being taught analytically, creatively, and practically and who recognize their strengths and weaknesses within this paradigm are those students who do not learn optimally from conventional transmission instruction. Permitting my students to decide for themselves how they would convey their philosophy of education and produce their final product/project allowed them to harness and act upon their strengths. Put another way, they were able to embrace a constructivist orientation and build on pre-existing understanding. In addition, perhaps along the way they had to acknowledge their weaknesses and compensate for them, but I do not know this for certain.

Grounding my decision to keep the final MI product/project, in the theory of successful intelligence, made good pedagogical sense to me, but my practical experience also played a vital role in my decision. For the reasons I stated previously, I believe Gardner (1983, 1999) and Sternberg (1985, 1997) would have endorsed my pedagogy. For obvious reasons, in this second example Gardner would support my use of his theory since I explicitly utilized his seven intelligences in the final philosophy of education assignment. However, I also believe Sternberg would have supported my pedagogical decision since the final assignment allowed a student to make the most of his/her strengths as a learner.

As a result of 16 years of practical classroom experience, where I used Gardner's (1983, 1999) MI extensively, I could almost guarantee a level of engagement from my students that would extend beyond my expectations. By allowing my students to tap into their own unique style of learning, or

intelligence, or as Sternberg and Grigorenko (2004) suggest “strength,” my student/learners had the opportunity to perhaps take themselves on a journey into a way of thinking that was beyond what they had imagined and beyond what I had imagined for them. I immersed myself, and my students, in this type of learning environment over and over again in my career as an elementary teacher. I believed this kind of learning environment could exist in a postsecondary classroom as well. In addition to my theoretical reasoning and my practical experience, I grounded my decision to keep the MI project/product based upon the initial reaction and immediate engagement from my students when I introduced this opportunity to them and this played a pivotal role in my decision to carry on with the assignment.

When I initially shared the alternative final project/product with my students, the response was overwhelmingly positive. I recall in one particular class when I was explaining examples of possible products they could create I mentioned a children’s storybook. I said, *“You could write a storybook and start it with once upon a time there was a boy or girl named so and so who wanted to become a teacher...”* As I explained this to them there was an audible gasp, with a crescendo of “ahhhs” from the group. I was taken aback by the uniform response from the majority of the participants. Their reactions verified the mutual enthusiasm for the project, and I could feel a shift in their understanding of how to initiate and convey their philosophy of education. Brookfield (2006) argued, “the most important knowledge skillful teachers need to do good work is a constant awareness of how students are experiencing their

learning and perceiving teachers' actions" (p. 17). I became immediately aware of their shift in understanding, and I associated their response to what I call an embodied response and I equated my understanding of their response to an embodied interpretation. "Having some insight into what students are thinking and feeling in our classes is the foundational, first-order teaching knowledge we need to do good work" (Brookfield, p. 28). In addition, according to Winfield (2010), "when you are unsure about what to do, always put your student's well being at the forefront of anything you are considering – when you do that, the answer usually becomes clearer" (p. 226). For these reasons, as well as my theoretical and practical positioning, I kept the final MI project/product as their culminating assignment. I did not succumb to the initial pressure to conform to the original paper only final assignment but rather grounded my decision in what I believed was a sound pedagogical decision influenced by years of theoretical, practical, and inter- and intrapersonal experience.

The personal communication I shared from a methods coinstructor, who just recently shared her experience of evaluating MI projects/products, indicates that she has had the same exhilarating experience that I have had the past 3 years. She is enthralled by her students' "exemplary projects" and their accompanying process piece. She also ponders the notion that when they are engaged in "meaningful and authentic" assignments, the students perhaps get the chance to explore in a "breadth and depth that they may not have considered." This speaks to me of Sternberg's (1997) theory of successful

intelligence, specifically weaknesses, where a person finds a way to recognize, correct and/or compensate for his/her weakness.

This scenario illustrated reflection-in-action, but at the heart of this scenario was reflection-on-action, whereby I was encouraged to “reflect on the forces that inspired these activities” (Brookfield, 1987, p. 132), and in doing so I was able to articulate why offering a choice MI final project/product was a sound pedagogical decision. Advocating and implementing a rich assessment task engaged our beginning teachers in an authentic way. This type of task could easily be adapted and transferred into their own teaching and learning practice. I make this assumption since I was able to transfer my MI experiences from an elementary classroom setting into a postsecondary classroom setting. I was certain that these future teachers, if they were motivated by this type of learning experience, could transfer this type of assignment from a postsecondary setting to an elementary classroom.

In this example, what I wanted my students to know became the practical application of Gardner’s (1983, 1999) learning theory, multiple intelligences, as it applied to their own authentic task of articulating their philosophy of education. I accomplished this by adjusting the final assignment and offering an alternative way to express knowledge, just as we demonstrate in our courses. What I hoped my students would do was embrace MI and give themselves permission to attempt something new and different. According to Brookfield (1987):

By becoming involved in activities that we have traditionally avoided or never considered, we can have our powers of imagination released.

Through immersing ourselves in the unknown, we may more easily be jolted out of the known. In our deciding or being asked to engage in a creative act with which we have no familiarity, or in opening ourselves to wholly new esthetic experiences, we may learn how to recognize and acknowledge the powers of imaginative speculation that lie within us.

(p. 132)

As they engaged in this type of project it was also my hope they would begin to understand the value in this type of MI experience by doing it and in turn transfer their experiential knowledge into their future teaching and learning practice. This would provide an opportunity for their students to tap into and use their own unique intelligence. Last, by being a teacher who was open to providing alternative creative and innovative assignments, I was modeling the characteristics of a teacher who had the practical experience to ground her theoretical knowledge in an embodied way for both herself and for many of her students.

In this section, I placed Drake's (2007) KNOW, from the KDB framework, in the metaphor local. I attempted to explicate what I would like students to KNOW when I teach Foundational Methods. Even though Probyn (1990) defines local as "practices which are directly stitched into the place and time which give rise to them" (p. 178), what should have become apparent from the two vignettes I provided is that even when something seems to be stitched

into time and place, when a skillful teacher is leading the way anything is possible. This is what I want my students to know. According to Brookfield (2006), “the point of teaching generally, is to help students learn. Doing this well means we have to take informed pedagogic actions” (p. 24). He goes on to explain that skillful teaching is contextually informed and that by integrating critically reflective habits into our practice this will ensure that our practice is a skillful one.

First and foremost, I want my students to know how to become skillful teacher/learners. This is not as an easy agenda to fulfill. Simply reading about skillful teaching may not translate into becoming skillful. I believe that it is important for me to BE the teacher that makes informed pedagogic decisions that are authentically generated from the lived experiences I am immersed in with the participants in my methods classes. My students need to experience firsthand this kind of knowledge.

In this section, I chose to share two stories surrounding my role in making significant syllabus changes, but I could have chosen other examples for what I would like students to know when they are taking my methods course. For example, in one session during a student-led presentation, we were engaged in an experiential learning activity. The two women presenting moved desks and created a wide-open space to conduct their presentation. We were going to experience what experiential learning looked and felt like in a classroom setting. Before they started their presentation I asked a student to close the door and explained to the class that this type of active learning

strategy often disrupted a more direct lecture style learning environment and that I was closing the door to be respectful of the other learning spaces around us.

The directions were given and the activity began. A flurry of movement and discussion ensued as the fully engaged groups of students discussed how they would attempt their task. Approximately 10 minutes later, a professor from the next room stormed into our class, turned off our lights, and told us to settle down and be quiet since his class was trying to learn. The students were shocked at his reaction. Even though I had previously shared with my students that this could occur, the fact that it did was more meaningful than my words of warning. They could sense and feel what it was like to be immersed in this type of teaching and learning environment. They could sense and feel how potentially disruptive this learning could be compared to other, more traditional environments. After this experience I felt my students were better prepared to decide for themselves if this was in fact a learning strategy and teaching/learning environment that appealed to them and if fit their philosophy of education. If so, they could now enter into this engagement as informed participants.

As may have been discerned, my attempt to delineate the KNOW from the DO and the BE, under the heading Local/KNOW, was most difficult; in fact it was impossible. In a skillful teaching and learning environment when students are engaged in experiential learning where embodiment is the ideal for deep learning to occur, there is no separating what I want a student to know

from what I would like a student to do and how I would like them to be. In fact, another layer of knowledge to consider is what I know and what I do and how I am being when I am in the same teaching and learning space as my students, since I believe this is a key element in how to engage students. This thread of the teacher self and student intimately entwined with the KBD framework (Drake, 2007) will continue to unravel as I carry on creating and synthesizing this application/descriptive chapter. Even though it was difficult to delineate the KDB, it was necessary, and coupled with the metaphor of locatedness, I will continue to use this metaphor as I begin the next section Locale/DO.

### **Locale/DO**

According to Probyn (1990), “we are always negotiating various locales; the ideal articulation of place and event recedes before us” (p. 179). Often the ideal classroom a beginning teacher or I envision never exactly matches what we are able to materialize or bring to life. What I aspire to have the students do does not always match with what I would like them to do. With this in mind, this section “serves to emphasize the lived contradictions of place and event” (Probyn, p. 182) for both my students and me as we attempt to engage active learners in the doing of teaching.

What I want students to do is begin to find out who they are so they can navigate the tangles of teaching, of which there are many, so they can serve their students well. In his book *The Courage to Teach*, Parker J. Palmer (1998) opens with his struggles to teach well even after decades of teaching experience. He writes, “what a fool I was to imagine that I had mastered this



occult art – harder to divine than tea leaves and impossible for mortals to do even passably well!” (p. 1). I was taken with this passage when I first read it. I understood his intent. Teaching is not easy if one wants to do it well, and for certain we will never master it. However, if one cares, opens his or her heart, and even loves, then s/he can become the teacher s/he was meant to become. This will help us deal with those moments in the classroom that are “lifeless or painful or confused – and I am so powerless to do anything about it – that my claim to be a teacher seems a transparent sham” (Palmer, p. 1). I have read this opening passage to my students the past three years on the first day of our Methods class as a way for us to “enter, not evade the tangles of teaching so we can understand them better and negotiate them with more grace, not only to guard our own spirits but also to serve our students well” (Palmer, p. 2).

### *Stones*

*“I know you have been sitting for awhile so it’s time to get up out of your seats, stretch, and make your way up to the front of the class and stand around the desk. Some of you may need to sit on the edge of the desks so you can see,” I instructed. As the class gathered around I continued, “Do you know what an inukshuk is?” I asked.*

*John put up his hand, “It is a man-like figure that the Inuit use as a marker for direction and/or guidance,” he stated.*

*“Yes, that is correct. How many people have seen one before?” I asked. Most people put their hands up. “Good, because today we are going to create one together. Most of you have in your possession a stone; some of you have a piece of soapstone and some of you have stones with words on them. As I read this passage I invite you to start to create a collaborative inukshuk. The people who have stones with the words believe, faith, love, imagine, and hope, and the three students who have the plaques “A teacher presents the past, reveals the*

*present and creates the future,” “Words are the voice of the heart,” and “Seek with the soul see with the heart” please wait until you hear something in my words that inspires you to place that stone or plaque on the table surrounding the inukshuk. Remember it doesn’t matter what the figure looks like, but what does matter is that we are creating it together. There is no right way to do this,” I reassured them. “While I am reading think about what kind of teaching and learning theories/strategies you are hearing in my words.” After this brief introduction I began my story: “I use stones in the building of this inukshuk as a metaphor for something I want to highlight today. Your challenge is to uncover what that something is. Each stone has potential, just like each child has potential. We can use our volition (our will) to build this inukshuk, just like we can use our volition to assist in the development of human potential.” I paused and took a deep breath. “I come to the teaching and learning environment with the complete belief that a person can move forward from where they are. How do you come to the teaching and learning environment?”*

*I noticed that no one has entered into the building of our collaborative inukshuk. I wonder why. Is it fear? Do they think they will do it incorrectly? Are they just too shy? I gently let them know that it is okay if they start to build it and it falls down. “Do you know why?” I asked.*

*“Because we can rebuild it,” Jennifer tentatively suggested thinking her answer was incorrect.*

*“YES!” I respond, “we can rebuild it, and guess what happens when we rebuild it,” I boldly asked.*

*“We will do it better than the first time,” Crystal in the front row suggested.*

*“Possibly or possibly not,” I replied, “and why it that?” I asked.*

*“Because we can see where we could improve, and if we try that and it falls again then we can simply start to rebuild again,” Chris suggested from the back row.*

*“Beautiful! So if it falls please do not fret just start to rebuild. Just make sure that everyone has a chance to place a stone.” I continued my words,*

*"When a child's physiological needs are met **and** his/her safety needs are met **and** his/her sense of belonging is flourishing both at home and at school **and** his/her love requirements are fulfilled, then the space for our students to be receptive to what they need to know and understand is more readily available."*

*Good, the inukshuk has begun! Many of the stones have been placed and the figure is coming to life. The "love" stone was placed beside the base of the living sculpture as well as the "believe" and the "faith" stones. I am once again reminded that students of all ages need encouragement in order to move forward from where they are.*

*"Knowledge, experiences and intuitive insights are all part of the learning process. For a deeper understanding to occur, constructing or building on previous knowledge using innovative techniques such as experiential learning and multiple intelligences is an effective teaching and learning strategy. Allowing a person's creativity and aesthetic needs to flourish also adds depth to that person's experience. By using discussion and dialogue, the students who learn best orally find their voice and are able to articulate their ideas more easily."*

*By now the inukshuk had fallen twice. Spontaneously, on the third attempt students started helping each other to construct a stronger foundation. I like how they are so respectful in sharing their advice with each other. I continued, "Teaching all students equally is easier said than done. We all come to the teaching and learning environment with our own set of assumptions and biases, me included! But if we begin to mine our assumptions and try to understand who we are and why we are the way we are and truly open our hearts, then teaching from a place of love becomes a reality. If we attempt to meet the needs of a diverse population, then moving them and ourselves towards self-actualization is a real possibility."*

*By now the inukshuk was built and the final "Seek with the soul, see with the heart" plaque was placed. The sculpture was complete. Good timing I thought to myself. I ended with: "Holistic education brings together a feeling of connectedness that goes beyond a student and teacher relationship. It also*

*includes peers, parents, other teachers, administration, and at times other agencies. Building towards becoming self-actualized is a collaborative effort, much like the building of this inukshuk. It takes the hands of many and the advice of some and the trust of all. Thank you for participating and working with each other in such a respectful and loving manner."*

I have come to view myself as a creative teacher educator. I am always searching for innovative ways to share knowledge. Using metaphor is just one approach for conveying a message. "The metaphors through which we organize our work have a powerful influence on both what we perceive and what we do" (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 1). By actively doing or engaging in activities with my students I had hoped that they were receiving the message I was bringing to them on more than one level. "Metaphors that we use influence what we look, listen, and feel for" (Freedman & Combs, p. 2), and in this example I used the building of an inukshuk to make reference to the many learning theories and learning strategies I connect with. I chose not to do a direct instruction lecture on Maslow's (1968) Hierarchy of Needs, Gardner's (1983, 1999) Multiple Intelligences, Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development, or Noddings's (1984) Ethic of Care, but rather I wove their teachings into the building of the inukshuk. I wanted to find out what my students already knew about these theorists and their theories, if anything. It was a diagnostic assessment if you will. According to Hill (2006),

a language that includes organic metaphors reverberates through bodies and time...this language form may enable teachers to make visible what we know, and to share this with student teachers, with parents, and with the communities in which we live and work. (p. 136)

By making constructivism visible, it was my hope that students would be encouraged to use this learning theory in their own classrooms.

By providing various stones of different colours and textures, soapstone for building, and plaques for the spiritual thinking, I had hoped to engage my students in an interactive process. By insisting my students get out of their seats and come to the front, it got them moving; in addition, by giving them a stone to feel in their hands, it brought in another different bodily-kinesthetic opportunity. When I read the passage and challenged them to think about what was behind the words, this forced them to think about the message I was attempting to convey and its subsequent intent. With the stones in hand the students had to build a collaborative inukshuk, which continued the bodily-kinesthetic opportunity. However, in the middle of the process I had to use Schön's (1987) reflection-in-action to make an instantaneous decision to assure them that it was okay for the inukshuk to topple, since I sensed that this was what was holding them back from participating. I let them know that the rebuilding process was just as, if not more, important than the final product. This brought an authentic learning moment to the group, since my students got to experience what their own students may feel when they are being asked to do something that is out of their comfort zone or if a student simply fears failure.

Throughout this session, I believed I was doing more with my students on many levels, mind, body, and even spirit, than what I could have accomplished standing at the front of the room firing off PowerPoint slides of text with theories attached to them. During the debriefing session at the end of

the task, in a collaborative spirit, my students were able to identify all the theories and theorists and in addition added their own interpretations of learning strategies and theories to the process. For example, one young man mentioned that the inukshuk was a good metaphor for constructivism, and he likened the inukshuk to building knowledge, and when new knowledge was experienced the inukshuk toppled, which allowed for the new knowledge to be accommodated through the building process of the next structure. Even though the end result was an inukshuk, the foundation had changed and the structure was reformed, adjusting to new knowledge. A new inukshuk emerged.

Other activities I have used to teach Methods are the photo essay using the garden as a metaphor for meeting the needs of diverse learners, first person monologue to illustrate how to teach a concept inside a story, I have used the Think Different Mac computer campaign posters to illustrate what famous people have said about the teaching and especially the learning process, I have shared a plethora of personal teaching stories which, according to my course evaluations, seems to be the event from which my students learned the most, and I have used direct instruction using PowerPoint slides. The next story reflects my foray into the world of PowerPoint direct instruction.

### *Lecture Hall*

*I was slotted for an 8:00 a.m. class on a Monday. I wondered how many students would turn up. I was there bright and early on the first day to settle into my new routine. I walked up the steep stairs to the fourth floor and found my room. The room was unlocked. I managed to open the door, still holding my computer case in one hand, a big bag of books and 35 syllabi in the other, and a lunch bag and a purse squeezed somewhere in between the two.*

*No wonder my husband called me the bag lady. I found the light switch and flicked it on. I was stunned. Thump. I dropped my bags. "I was totally snowed!" I thought to myself as I looked up, up, up to the top of the lecture hall. "So that is why she asked me if I wouldn't mind switching classrooms with another instructor. I was supposed to be in the smaller more manageable classroom across the hall." I picked up my bags one at a time and made my way over to the lectern that sat front and center of this expansive amphitheatre.*

*"What have I gotten myself into?" Here I was, a brand new Foundational Methods instructor, new to the university setting and procedures. I thought I was doing someone a favour by changing sections, but I am now thinking that there was an ulterior motive. She is across the hall in a nice, neat, compact classroom with 30 desks where everyone is at eye level. I am in this sprawling lecture hall built for over a hundred students with unmovable desks and no one at eye level. I am convinced that she knew what she was doing when she asked the administrator to switch groups.*

*Note to self: It does not matter where you teach, the new person often gets the short end of the stick. I had seen this happen far too often in the elementary school system, where administration would assign a new teacher a split class. That never made sense to me. For three of the last four years, I taught a grade 7/8 split so that a new teacher would not have to experience two new curriculums in her induction, second, and third years of teaching. Now, as the beginning Methods instructor, I was given the job of teaching teachers in a course that was developed using a constructivist framework and I had the task of carrying it out in a vast lecture hall.*

*When the students started to arrive I could see the back rows were filling up first, so I immediately invited the folks from the top 10 rows to move down closer to the front, but only a few students took the bait.*

*My first lecture from the lectern was not out of the ordinary since so much administrivia had to take place in the initial 2-hour time frame. There was no other way to impart this information. However, as the weeks progressed I became increasingly frustrated with my approach to teaching this*

*course and with myself. I allowed PowerPoint presentations, translation direct instruction, to drive my practice. When I thought back to the introductory Methods Team discussions on how we would implement this course, the PowerPoint presentation was emphasized as the mode of transmission. In addition, we were required to set up a WebCT account so the students could print off a copy of our slides before the lecture. When I reflect on this, our practice was not in alignment with our theoretical underpinnings of constructivism. Just because we had a reduced class size of 30 students did not mean that deeper, more meaningful learning was taking place in our classrooms or, in my case, the lecture hall. I was not delivering the type of program I wanted to.*

*In the middle of my lecture on Philosophical Orientation, in our seventh session, I stopped my lecture and turned the PowerPoint projector off. I began, "I feel like a bit of a fraud. Here I am telling you I am a constructivist and a humanist in today's philosophical orientation, and yet I am talking at you from down here, transmitting knowledge. This does not feel right to me. I have never engaged my students this way, and yet I have resorted to a transmission mode since I entered the university setting. I have reflected upon this, and I could use the excuse that it is due to the course mandate using PowerPoint and WebCT, or the way this room is set up with you folks way up there so far away, or this unmovable lectern, or the big screen showing my PowerPoint, but quite frankly, I am finding it is a lot easier preparing PowerPoint presentations than preparing centers and exploratory learning activities. I am not happy with what I am doing. I am turning into Lunch Bag Bob [a metaphor I used for the teacher who teaches the same thing year after year]. I need to do this differently, and I need to do it better. As I understand, all of your instructors are teaching you about how to teach more effectively in order for students to have a deeper, more meaningful learning experience, me included, and yet I am doing exactly what I am asking you not to do, and I am not happy about this. I am a hypocrite. I need to do things differently so you will feel empowered to do things differently. I just wanted you to know how I am feeling about what is*



*happening right here, right now in reference to my own teaching and learning practice.” The lecture hall fell silent. I was not sure what was going on in their heads at that moment. I turned the projector back on and finished my lecture.*

*Many students talked to me after class and/or emailed me and told me that they appreciated the fact that I openly and honestly articulated that I was not teaching the way I suggested they should be teaching in a classroom setting. My students thought it was refreshing that someone reflected upon her own practice and took responsibility for her actions and stated it in an open manner.*

*Second, what they shared with me was that even though I was not happy with my direct instruction lecture, what I was doing well was interweaving my practical experiential stories from my elementary teaching experience into the theory I was presenting that week during my PowerPoint lecture. For them this was an essential element that offered them the most useful information and that was summarily reflected in my course evaluations.*

*From session eight onwards I changed my approach. I prepared more hands-on experiential learning activities with them. I did a Circle Meeting session with them. I walked up and down the stairs and did not hang around the front and center so much. And what this did was allow me to look at people at eye level and engage learners. I began to teach through discussion, which was always an approach I felt most comfortable doing. What I began to notice was that fewer and fewer students sat in the back rows. They moved down to the middle and center areas, which created a cozier atmosphere. In the end, I relearned how to engage students in a meaningful way. I must remember to thank my colleague for wanting to switch rooms.*

Again at the heart of this scenario is Schön's (1987) reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action and Brookfield's (1995) critical reflection in relation to critical pedagogy. For me reflection comes naturally, even organically. It has always been a strategy that I gravitated to when a situation that required reflection presented itself. It is a way of being that I consider essential for

beginning teachers to what I call witness-in-action. I believe they need to see what it looks like and sense what it feels like, and when this occurs I believe they are more likely to engage in this practice. This is where I feel I differ from many university lecturers. I show my vulnerabilities. I genuinely come to the teaching and learning space to grow and to improve my practice, and by exposing my weaknesses I often interrupt the status quo. When utilized, critical pedagogy

analyzes education as a process through which dominant social and economic groups impose values and beliefs that legitimize their own power and position of control. The teacher's task is to expose and resist this process by finding and creating spaces in which students can learn to become aware of how the process works and how to fight against it. (Brookfield, p. 208)

By allowing myself to fall into a rhythm of direct instruction, reproduction of knowledge became the end result. I easily slipped into a transmission of knowledge mode, and I was uncomfortable with setting that example for my teacher candidates. By reconnecting with previous teaching strategies, specifically teaching through discussion, students were "helped to name, honour and understand their own experiences" (Brookfield, p. 208), including the experience they were engaged in, whereby I was espousing constructivism but using direct instruction. In this section locale "serves to emphasize the lived contradictions of place and event" (Probyn, 1990, p. 182). My living contradiction was blatantly exposed. I chose to communicate to my students

via lecture style but espoused a very different, in fact opposite approach to teaching and learning.

Utilizing a critical pedagogical approach created an opportunity for me to adapt, change, and shift my practice. It created a stronger, more viable teaching and learning environment for both my students and me. However, this occurred only when *I* took action. “Action and reflection are seen as being in a state of constant and productive tension, often referred to as ‘praxis’. The point of education is not just to understand the world, but to change it, often through collective endeavor” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 209). In the end, “teachers have a choice either to work in ways that legitimize and reinforce the status quo or in ways that liberate and transform the possibilities people see in their lives” (Brookfield, p. 209). I hoped my actions of changing my teaching approach to realign with my constructivist and humanist values and beliefs liberated and transformed the possibilities my students saw in their lives as beginning teachers.

Sternberg’s (1997) successful intelligence surfaced once again in this scenario. Even though I truly believed things were not going well and openly shared this with my students, they still recognized my strength for weaving stories into the theory I was espousing which provided them with authentic practical teaching examples. Regardless of the internal struggles I faced, there was something positive in my delivery that made the teaching and learning environment meaningful. My practical knowledge allowed me to provide my students with concrete examples of what holism looked like in a classroom.

When I share stories of this nature it opens the door for my students to discuss their struggles with constructivism and holism. This past academic year I had a young man stay behind after our third class together to talk to me one-on-one. He said, "I know what you are trying to tell us about teaching the mind, body, and spirit of a child, but I am a math guy. I see things in black and white. How can I teach holistically when I teach math?" I felt his inner struggle, and I still feel it now months later. But I have to admit I walked away from that interaction thinking to myself, "I have done my job." I brought a new awareness about teaching the whole child into his way of thinking which was not present before. Now, it is up to him. He has to take action if he wants to teach this way. I cannot do it for him for only I can walk through the gate, but what I think I did accomplish was share an approach, a possibility for teaching the whole child by living it, and modeling it as much as I possibly could in the classroom. I accomplished what I set out to do, which was bring an awareness of the various learning theories that create deep, sustained, enduring learning happening for students. This knowledge now rests with my students as they continue to develop their philosophy of education by aligning their philosophy with learning theories and teaching strategies that complement their philosophy.

In the locale, where I placed Drake's (2007) DO, from the KDB framework, I attempted to elucidate the learning theories and teaching strategies I would like my beginning teachers to DO in their own classrooms. In this section, I juxtaposed a story about a teaching moment where I engaged my students using the Inukshuk metaphor to actively convey constructivism in

tandem with a series of sessions where I struggled to promote constructivism by using a direct instruction lecture. I had resorted to a teaching strategy that I had hoped my students would not resort to which was direct instruction as a sole means of conveying information. My living contradictions were illuminated-in-action as I openly reflected upon the challenges I faced teaching Foundational Methods. I learned how easy it was to fall into the rhythm of lecturing, and it was a place I did not want to land.

Through an organic reflective process of evaluating my own contradictory teaching actions, I was able to shift what I was doing in my teaching and learning practice and bring it back into a space where my values and beliefs were in alignment with what I espoused. By organic reflection I am referring to a process that has not been reduced to a technique but rather is a part of my embodied experience. I have referred to Schön's (1987) reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, which does make clear what I do, but what is missing from his description is where my reflection originates.

In one of my data generation stories I wrote about my first teacher evaluation where I was told I epitomized Schön's Reflective Practitioner. At that time I did not know who Donald Schön was, nor had I heard of the characterization of reflective practitioner. So where did my ability to reflect stem from? I believe I reflect organically, meaning "reflection is the embodied experience of relation with time and self and other" (Hill, 2006, p. 114). Reflection for me has not been reduced to technique, or an explicit activity such as a double-journal entry, but rather "reflection is an experience of embodied

relation” (Hill, p. 114). I do it organically in the moment in relation to who I am with and what I am doing. However, I have found that the more knowledgeable I have become with regards to learning theories and strategies, the more grounded my reflections have become. I am able to teach Foundational Methods from not only a practical space but also a theoretical space, and in doing so I have deepened my embodied knowing, which has improved my teaching and learning practice.

Once again my attempt to delineate the DO from the KNOW and the BE under the heading Locale/DO was not possible. What I wanted my students to do, which was become aware and knowledgeable in the learning theories of constructivism and holism, I needed to model and carry out or do in my own teaching and learning practice. The way I needed to be in order to make that happen was to teach in the way I was espousing.

Drake’s (2007) KDB framework can be split apart and explicated as separate entities, but to live the KDB integrated approach and teach and learn this way, one needs to be a person who values integration, who values holism, who values constructivism, and who values humanism in order bring the kind of BEing into the classroom where this type of learning environment can exist. It has become evident to me from all the teaching and learning stories I have shared in this dissertation that I have to not just be the bridge that connects the KNOW to the DO to the BE, but rather facilitate the creation of a thirdspace in order to critically examine the potential importance of this type of teaching and learning environment, but I cannot do it alone. In Chapter Six, I explore

thirdspace theory as a space where my students and I discuss, challenge, examine, and interrogate a thirdspace or hybrid space (Bhabha, 1994; Soja, 1996) as I attempt to move my students and myself towards a potentially transformational experience.

At the outset of this chapter, I asserted that I would describe learning activities grounded in constructivism and humanism that would illuminate what a Foundational Methods university course would look like, but what I have actually done is told learning stories that reflected these lived theories. However, inside the stories are scenarios whereby examples of learning activities such as building an Inukshuk to illuminate a learning theory or having the students complete a hands-on philosophy of education final project/product are described. What has come to the surface in this chapter is that the BE that bridges the KNOW and DO that a lecturer brings to the classroom cannot be separated from the KDB s/he wants his/her students to accomplish. The two cannot be separated, and this has made the writing of this chapter exciting. The BEing a lecturer brings to a classroom will dictate what learning theory is essential for him/her. What s/he wants his/her students to know and wants them to do is as important as how a lecturer brings BEing into the classroom. This will be tackled in the next section Location/BEing.

### **Location/BEing**

What constitutes a site of knowing and doing? Where do we come to know something the mind or perhaps the body? What do we do in order to insure we come to know something? Location, for Probyn (1990) "delineates

what we may hold as knowable” (p. 178) and refers to both the “process of determining what constitutes sites of knowledge” (Jewett, 2008, p. 22) and “also that process which determines what we experience as knowledge and what we know as experience” (Probyn, p. 184). For me, this process is how one brings BEING into the classroom. According to Drake and Burns (2004), “values are in the classroom, whether we want them to be or not. Every day, teachers teach personal values by what they say and do, or do not say and do” (p. 49). I agree with their summation, and in addition I believe that how I bring BEing into classroom is for me how I also bring the KNOW and the DO into the classroom. As a holistic teacher educator, the focus for me is on relationships, specifically the relationship between the KNOW the DO and the BE. For me, the three are not separate. As a constructivist and humanist my being is situated in what I want students to know and what I would like them to do.

How I approach my Foundational Methods teaching and learning environment is directly related to the learning paradigms I espouse. As V. Richardson (2003) pointed out “using constructivist approaches in teacher education instruction” (p. 3) moves instruction from a lecture format to one where the instructor “acts as a facilitator in the development of individual and group meaning around classroom teaching” (p. 3). In my learning story, when I shifted my role from lecturer to facilitator or guide, I was able to lead students in the teaching and learning approach I valued and the teaching and learning approach I wanted them to be made aware of.



In comparison, humanism focuses on human freedom, dignity, and potential. According to Huitt (2001), a central assumption of humanism is that people act with intentionality and values. This notion is in alignment with Drake's (2007) BE, whereby an instructor brings his/her values into the classroom each and every day. What a person values tends to become a core tenet of his/her teaching practice. Humanists such as Maslow (1968) and Rogers (1980) believed that it was necessary to study a person as a whole in order for him/her to reach his/her full potential. Therefore, when I worked with beginning teachers, I guided them towards an in-depth study of the self by looking at two aspects, first, what motivated them, and second, what constituted a goal for them. Both were areas of interest for me.

In humanism, learning is student centered and personalized, and the instructor's role is that of a facilitator, much like in a constructivist teaching and learning environment. In fact the two learning paradigms complement each other. Constructivist theory is focused on personal meaning making, and humanism focuses on the study of the self, motivation, and goals (Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1980). These three characteristics of humanism inform personal meaning making. An individual has to be motivated to make personal meaning, s/he learns about the self in the process of personal meaning making, and last, having a personal goal in mind is essential when one is constructing personal knowledge. The facilitator is not transmitting what s/he wants a student to learn, but rather the learning process is an intrinsically motivated course of

action whereby the learner is engaged in personal meaning making from the experience s/he has undergone.

*Story On –What is my grade?*

*"I know you are not going to like this Hilary, but can you please tell me what mark I got?" she asked sheepishly.*

*"What makes you say I won't like it Amelia?" I asked with an eternal grin forming on my heart.*

*"Well, you do not stress 'marks' as a way of realizing learning and I am asking you for a number mark instead of a P1 so I can know how well I did," she explained.*

*"Okay, so can you tell me why you need to know the number mark so I can understand where you are coming from?" I asked sincerely wanting to understand her motivation.*

*"Well, I had to work so hard all through school in order to succeed, and once I started getting high marks, that motivated me even more to work harder," she said with a look of success in her eye.*

*"So let me fully understand this. You need to know your number grade right now in order to know how well you performed on the written critique even though you have it in your hand right now, it is filled with comments in the margin, and you have the rubric indicating a P1 which is a grade between 80 and 100, is this correct?"*

*"Yes," she replied.*

*"How well do you think you did?" I asked*

*"Well I think I got a 13 or 14 out of 15 since I related my observation day experiences to the concepts in the text. Basically, I interwove the theory I learned in class with what I was or in some cases what I was not observing in practice," she explained.*

*"You earned a 14 out of 15 for that very reason Amelia. Well done!"*

*"Thank you Hilary."*

*"And thank you for explaining to me what motivates you Amelia." For Amelia's remaining assignments I included a number grade with the rubric that illustrated a P1 through P4 grade. She was the sole student that received a number grade alongside her rubric score.*

*Near the end of the course Amelia approached me one-on-one after I had handed back the final assignment. "Am I the only student who received a number grade?" she asked timidly.*

*"Yes you are." I replied, "You were the only one who requested it, but I am certain others wanted to know their number grade but were afraid to ask me since they probably thought I would not have agreed with their philosophy, much like what you felt like when you asked me," I honestly replied. "But to be quite honest, I was thankful you requested it since I got a glimpse into why you needed to see a grade, and that gave me a deeper understanding of someone's motivation for wanting a number mark."*

*During our final session the participants had a choice of sharing their thoughts about the course, their philosophy of education projects, or something of their choosing. When the Speaking Rock was placed in Amelia's hands she looked at me, took a deep breath, and spoke. "What I am going to take away from this course is that you forced us to look inside ourselves and find out why we do the things we do and then, and only then, can we make a change if we choose to, and for that I will be eternally grateful."*

*To this day I am left pondering whether Amelia was referring to the fact that she needed a number to validate her learning. Or did her need to see a numerical grade shift when she began to realize that she was able to reflect upon her learning and accurately articulate what she had done well and what she needed to work on even before the number was revealed? If so, was her ability to successfully reflect upon her learning enough for her now or did she still need a number grade to validate and verify her intelligence? More important, how will her way of being affect her teaching and learning practice? Will she want her students to be motivated by marks or by enduring learning*

*experiences? I will never know, but what I do know is that she thanked me for challenging her way of being.*

### *Story Two—I Got Dinged*

*The class right after the first teaching block was set aside for a debriefing session in the form of a circle meeting. As I lit the candle I said, "Today I dedicate this circle meeting to the students who were fortunate enough to have you as their guides on their learning journey." When the wick was ablaze I moved back to my space in the circle. Holding the speaking rock I said, "As always when the rock gets to you, you have the right to pass, but if you would like to, please share a story of your teaching experience while out in the field." As the rock made its way around the circle it stopped in the hands of beginning teachers who told humorous stories, emotional stories, serious stories, stories of frustration, and some stories illustrating the struggle of putting learning theories into practice. Then the rock reached Matt. He shared a story about a learning experience he had while teaching science, a subject he loved. He began:*

*"My placement was in two grade 7 Science classes of 28 and 30 students. The first day I started my teaching block my Associate told me that she needed Report Card marks for a strand in Understanding Matter and Energy: Pure Substances and Mixtures. She point blank told me that the only way she could get the marks in time was if I followed her unit plan. Each day I would have the students copy down a note of background information for an experiment. Next, the experiment would be explained, and then the students would come up with a hypothesis of what they thought would happen. Finally, I would conduct an experiment for the whole class to observe, and they would write down their observations. I did not particularly like this idea, since I knew it was not going to stimulate learning by copying words onto a page and then passively watch someone else do an experiment. I wanted the kids to be involved and engaged in the learning process. I wanted them to conduct the lesson and discover the results for themselves. But she was evaluating me, so I figured I better do as she asked so I could get a decent mark.*

*After a few days I realized it just wasn't working. Classroom management was a nightmare since the fast copiers had too much free time in between the note and the experiment and the slow copiers never got the note completed. It was not fun. Then I overheard two students saying how much they hated science, and that just did it for me. I was here to engage students, not to disengage them.*

*The next day I changed the lesson structure. I prepared a photocopied note for the students so they did not have to spend 20-25 minutes writing words from the overhead. Then I set up experiment stations around the room. I went over safety procedures, and from then on I had the students doing experiments for most of the period. I had changed the format she had suggested, but they still got the information they needed in the form of a photocopied note, but instead of me doing the experiment, they conducted the experiment, making observations to their own experiments. For the most part they were totally engaged in the learning process.*

*By the end of my block most of the students were really excited about science. I had one student tell me she had never liked science before until now. I didn't know that a comment like that could make me feel so good inside. However, in the end my associate dinged me on my evaluation. She said that I did not follow through with her instructions on lesson planning and unit planning. She also stated that my classroom management was chaotic. You know, it may have seemed that way to her in comparison to her relatively quiet classroom, but I thought the students were totally engaged and the noise in the room was productive chatter. If I had to do it again I wouldn't change a thing, since I know the students were having fun and learning at the same time. In the final analysis, I put my students' needs before my own with regards to my practicum evaluation, and I would do it that way again since that is why I wanted to become a teacher, so that kids could be involved and have fun in the learning process."*

These two stories reflect a way of BEing that I carried into the classroom. I challenged beginning teachers' assumptions about teaching and

learning while they were students themselves in the throes of learning the theoretical underpinning of teaching. I wanted to challenge their assumptions around teaching methods and assessment and evaluation techniques that promoted a transmission of knowledge approach which results in the reproduction of the status quo. I accomplished this by promoting learning paradigms that the beginning teacher candidates perhaps had never experienced before in their own career as a student. In order to be an instructor that disrupted the status quo, I needed to illuminate that the process of teaching learning is often situated, where according to Olsen (2008):

Learning is perceived entirely as a social activity within an actual context in which participants begin to think in new ways, undergo identity shifts, adopt new ways of using language, reformulate relationships to the world, and produce both artifacts and memories. (p. 17)

By openly challenging our traditional grading system, the same system that garnered beginning teachers entry into the teacher education program, in favour of teaching for deep, sustained learning and the ability to self-assess, I engaged beginning teachers in a variety of emotionally driven discussions that challenged their way of thinking about schooling and what it means to teach and learn. In the first story, by modeling for Amelia that I was willing to share her numerical grade with her, even though she knew it went against what I valued regarding the teaching and learning process at this level, let her experience a teacher/instructor/lecturer that attempted to meet her individual

needs as a learner. I was being open and flexible to her as a learner in spite of my own engrained beliefs and values. Implicitly, Amelia got to experience that “there is no activity that is not situated” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 33) and that the situatedness of this activity was anything but simple. The way I was BEing in the classroom

took on the proportions of a general theoretical perspective, the basis of claims about the relational character of knowledge and learning, about the negotiated character of meaning and about the concerned (engaged, dilemma-driven) nature of learning activity for the people involved.

(Lave & Wenger, p. 33)

I created a situated learning environment whereby I was modeling how I wanted students to BE by espousing an epistemological stance that I believed in but at the same time was willing to forgo in order to meet the individual needs of a student. Amelia understood this when she asked me if I had given anyone else a numerical grade and my response was no. How do I improve my practice has been at the center of this self-study and the answer is yes, I have improved my practice. Earlier in my career, I would not have been willing to be as open and flexible as I was with Amelia. But through deliberate and intentional self-reflexivity, whereby my intentional reflections have impacted my teaching, I was able to put my strong beliefs aside and do what was best for my student. As I metareflect on my actions as I write this, I see how this has strengthened and improved my teaching and learning practice. I have also come to the

realization that teaching and teaching teachers is not the same thing. This will be thoroughly discussed in Chapter Six: Thirdspace.

In the second story, *I Got Dinged*, I would like to believe that I had some influence on Matt's decision to do what was best for his students when he resolved to improve his own teaching and learning practice after overhearing two students remark how much they disliked science, but I do not know for certain whether I did. That being said, I do not need to know for certain, and for me that is the attraction of qualitative research. Qualitative research does not chase after answers but rather considers and uncovers possibilities. It is possible that I did have an influence on Matt's decision, but nothing is for certain. However, what was crystallized for me is what I did with my uncertainty, since I had a choice. I made a personal decision to believe that I did have a subtle impact on his decision-making process due to my relentless and persistent message of looking after the social and emotional well-being of a child/student/human being before attempting to impart knowledge. Again, by believing that there is no activity that is not situated, I believe in

emphasis on comprehensive understanding involving the whole person rather than 'receiving' a body of factual knowledge about the world; on activity in and with the world; and on the view that agent, activity, and the world mutually constitute each other. (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 33)

For me this is the most important building block in the teaching and learning process. When I made the decision to teach from this ontological and epistemological stance I believed whole-heartedly that my beginning teachers,



the agents, and my message of teaching the whole child by modeling this in my BEing, and the world, do mutually constitute each other. Therefore, I must believe that my BEing did have a subtle impact on Matt's decision to improve his practice, or why am I here? I have a choice, and that choice is to believe that I do make a difference in the lives of the students I teach no matter how small.

I am a humanist and a constructivist. As a humanistic I act with intentionality and values. As a constructivist I believe knowledge is a "holistic, continuous, and recursively constructed assemblage of past and present, personal and professional, stance and understanding" (Olsen, 2008, p. 15). Both work in unison and provide a scaffold for me to BE the kind of teacher practitioner that is a facilitator or a guide rather than "the" expert. I hope the beginning teachers I work with begin to understand who they are (the BE) and understand why they are this way (the recursive assemblage of past and present), and that what they value tends to become the core tenet of their teaching practice. It is my hope that our beginning teachers will hold their own students at the center of their practice. Therefore, when adopting a learning paradigm from which they will inevitably build their own teaching and learning practice, I will encourage them to examine both the pros and cons of that learning paradigm and be able to be self-reflexive as they interrogate decisions they will make that will directly impact the students they will teach.

To sum up this section, I used Location/BEing to examine a "process which determines what we experience as knowledge and what we know as

experience” (Probyn, 1990, p. 184). What I have experienced as knowledge and what I know as experience is twofold and equally important when working with beginning teachers. Both my practical knowledge as an experienced elementary teacher and my theoretical knowledge as an academic have informed my practice guiding beginning teachers from their role as student to that of professional teacher. I have ascertained that how I act or my BEING as a teacher, instructor, and/or lecturer directly influences what my students experience as knowledge and what they know as experience. Teaching teachers then for me is not the same as teaching elementary students, and this has been a tacit knowing moment for me. I unequivocally concur with Polanyi (1983) when he stated, “we can know more than we can tell” (p. 4). The “unseen and invisible aspects of an experience, thus making possible a sense of the wholeness or essence of a phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 21) is what I will attempt to accomplish in Chapter Six: The Thirdspace, where I suggest I am able to focus on two spaces simultaneously and in doing so I am able to take action in order to effect change.

## CHAPTER SIX: THIRDSPEACE

*Thirdspace is to encourage you to think differently about the meanings and significance of space and those related concepts that compose and comprise the inherent spatiality of human life: place, location, locality, landscape, environment, home, city, region, territory, and geography. In encouraging you to think differently, I am not suggesting that you discard your old and familiar ways of thinking about space and spatiality, but rather that you question them in new ways that are aimed at opening up and expanding the scope and critical sensibility of your already established spatial or geographical imaginations. (Soja, 1996, p. 1)*

### Overview

In this chapter, I use a hybrid space (Bhabha, 1994, Soja, 1996), Thirdspace theory, to better understand the binaries that have emerged throughout this self-study. One example is the binary between a traditional approach to teaching and learning with a more progressive approach. A further example, takes into consideration the instructional strategy a teacher utilizes such as an experiential learning opportunity compared to a direct instructional approach utilizing rote learning and memorization. Both examples, required a way for me to redefine, recreate, and rebuild my assumptions around these binaries and others, that emerged during the research process. Thirdspace theory provided a framework for me to puzzle educational dilemmas that presented themselves and allowed me to reconcile the binaries that existed in my teaching and learning practice.

### Teacher Performance Appraisal

*"Did you hear what happened at my school this week?" Ben inquired as we were sweating it out on the elliptical trainer at 6 a.m.*

*"No," I replied, not exactly sure what to expect. I had known Ben for 20 years. We had taught together early on in my career. For the past 10 years*

*he had been quite down on the education system after the chaotic implementation of the new curriculum in Ontario and more recently the cutting back of Physical and Health Education, his specialty. I tried to steer away from talking to him about education in general for a couple of reasons. One, since I knew our philosophies of education were diametrically opposed, and two, I was at the gym to de-stress and I did not want to get into a heavy discussion. But on this occasion, since I had so many friends still working at his school I was concerned that what he had to tell me was affecting one of them.*

*"Did you know a fellow named Ian who has been at the school for the past few years?"*

*"No," I replied.*

*"He had been teaching for over 30 years before he was placed with us. He had his mandatory Teacher Performance Appraisal earlier this year and was given an 'unsatisfactory' after teaching for over 30 years!" Ben emphasized. "He did not agree with his assessment so he challenged it. Ever since he decided to challenge it he has been going through a process with mediators and the administration." Ben looked at me. His eyes took on a, "can you believe this?" glare. He continued, "Last week Ian got up, went to do a workout before school, and dropped dead of a heart attack," his voice trailed off. "They should not do this to us!" were his final angry words.*

This is not an uncommon story. Teachers nearing the end of their career or shortly into their retirement pass away suddenly without warning, and there is such sadness and a feeling of loss by these events. How could this happen? He worked his whole life and never got to enjoy the fruits of his labour are sentiments people often intimate. They start to think about their own lives, their own situations, their own health, and reflect upon all the things they could be doing differently and perhaps even learning how to live in the moment so they can enjoy what they have in the present instead of waiting for that ever-illusive

future. This is a typical response to tragic events such as Ian's untimely death. However, what struck me was the way this story was told. Through Ben's eyes, Ian's story took on a much different feel. What he suggested was that it was the TPA (Teacher Performance Appraisal) process that cost Ian his life. Ben's final words indicated that *they*, administration, or more globally the educational policy itself that outlines a schedule of appraising teachers every 4 years, *should not do this to us*.

As I listened to the story I could not help but reflect on how it was being told and why, but more important I wondered if it was indeed the TPA process that caused Ian's undue stress. While pondering this I wanted to make sure my teacher candidates viewed the TPA experience differently, perhaps more proactively. As Ben continued to talk, I started to think about the beginning teachers I worked with. How would they interpret the TPA?

I never considered my TPA as an "Us" versus "Them" dichotomy but rather as a collaborative experience where a colleague, albeit a Principal or Vice-Principal, observed my practice and gave me critical feedback to help me become a better teacher. While Ben was telling his story to me I realized I was interpreting his story and redefining it to recreate a different story with a different ending. Suddenly, I silenced my train of thought and metareflected on what had just transpired. I had entered a transitional space. I was no longer an elementary school teacher but rather a university instructor working with beginning teacher candidates; however, I was still very connected to Ben's story from a teacher's perspective. As he continued sharing his viewpoint I

drifted off into my own thoughts. How could I gather *this* experience and share it in such a way that the beginning teachers I worked with, our future teachers, could begin to see the TPA differently right from the first day they walked into the classroom.

What I was beginning to imagine for myself was a navigational thirdspace where I contemplated redefining, recreating, and rebuilding (Soja, 1996) people's assumptions about how they experience an evaluative process such as a TPA. The concept of thirdspace from this perspective is drawn from the work of Edward Soja, who is an urban geographer. He explored how physical space operates in the socialization of human interaction and, concomitantly, how social spaces can shape the physical. Soja directs us to look beyond the binary categories of first and second spaces of the physical and social. In my introductory story, the first and second spaces constructed in opposition to one another was the way the Teacher Performance Appraisal (TPA) was perceived and/or understood by a practicing teacher working in an elementary school in opposition to how the TPA was perceived and/or understood by an instructor working with beginning teachers at a university. I was able to focus on two spaces simultaneously, and while thinking *with* Ben's story (Frank, 2002), I was able to "draw selectively and strategically from the two opposing categories" (Soja, p. 5) and open a new alternative to understanding the TPA as a learning experience that involves a collaborative endeavour. It is a process that, if carried out effectively, could improve a teacher's practice. By virtue of being in a position to guide beginning teachers

to redefine, recreate, and rebuild their assumptions about how they experience an evaluative process, my thirdspace meanderings when put into action is a way for me to improve my practice while at the same time encouraging the beginning teachers I work with to become agents of change.

I purposefully began this chapter with a story to illuminate a situation where thirdspace could be concretely understood. Illustrating how I became aware of a thirdspace, which allowed me to puzzle an educational dilemma, now enables me to refer back to this example as an exemplar as I move through this chapter discussing how utilizing thirdspace and trialectical thinking, a necessary component of thirdspace, which will be thoroughly explained later on in the chapter, has created the space for action and change to take place throughout my teaching and academic career and possibly my whole life.

### **Theoretical Perspectives on Thirdspace and Hybridity**

This study was initially undertaken to explore ways for me to improve my teaching and learning practice and soon morphed into a more specific focus of finding ways to improve my teaching and learning practice with beginning teachers. Considering this is a self-study, it is not surprising that my question shifted when my career changed from elementary school teacher to university lecturer. After writing my collection of narratives and carefully examining and interpreting each story for its hidden meaning in the Hermeneutic Interlude, binary categories of how I learned and where learning and/or experience needed to exist for me emerged. What I required was a framework that would assist me in reconciling the binaries that have driven my academic career beginning in

junior high school and culminating in my present role as a university lecturer. Hybridity theory answered the call.

Hybridity theory recognizes the complexity of examining people's everyday spaces (Bhabha, 1994; Soja, 1996). It connects to thirdspace because thirdspaces are hybrid spaces. They are what Bhabha calls "in-between" spaces between several different funds of knowledge. Funds of knowledge are the ways we come to know: through practical experience, relationship, school, home, cultural knowledge to name just a few.

Hybridity theory contends that people draw on multiple funds of knowledge to make sense of the world. In my work, I am perpetually trying to figure out how to improve my practice and in turn the teaching practices of future teachers on the cusp of entering the teaching profession. I often tap into a variety of funds of knowledge and this has the potential to move my practice forward as I illustrated in the opening story. The funds of knowledge I drew on were from the practical experience I gained as an elementary teacher, and the theoretical and practical experiences I had as a university instructor/researcher when pondering how I could make the TPA a more positive experience for beginning teachers. Having the ability to draw on multiple funds of knowledge opened me to the possibility of seeing the TPA from another vantage point.

Drawing on multiple funds of knowledge is not something new for me. As the data in my collection of narratives suggested, I have been doing this my entire life. The binaries of school and home; athletics and school; and athletics and home as multiple funds of knowledge emerged from my stories as opposing



entities. During the Hermeneutic Interlude when I interpreted the message held within each story, I felt there was little hope of reconciling the chasm that the binaries created for me. One such example was my academic learning experiences at school compared to learning experiences at home. I felt capable, intelligent, and empowered at home and incapable, unintelligent, and not confident in the classroom at school. Both experiences were so diametrically opposed I never believed I would find a way to merge the differences. This was in part due to the binaries that existed between the modes of learning I experienced.

Throughout the data modes of learning such as traditional versus constructivist teaching/learning; fragmented versus holistic teaching/learning; and rote memorization versus experiential/embodied learning were brought to light through my stories. These opposing funds of knowledge could have been both constraining and/or productive in terms of my social and cultural practices and even my identity development depending on how I considered them. At the outset of this dissertation I was constrained by their apparent influence on my academic self-worth and even self-identified as an unintelligent student/learner; however, hybridity or thirdspace has created a space for me to integrate these competing knowledges and apply them productively to my identity perceptions, which has led me to an improved sense of self. I no longer feel I am or, more important, was an unintelligent student/learner.

Soja (1996) suggests we look beyond the binary categories that exist and the ones we created for ourselves, and generate new knowledge. He contends

that a commitment to thirdspace demands a suspicion of binaries. During the writing of this dissertation I deemed that my teaching and learning practice was incomplete; I had come to the conclusion that it was the binary notion of traditional versus constructivist and direct instruction versus experiential learning that kept my teaching and learning practice as it was, one-sided, and therefore, incomplete. Once I entered a thirdspace, I was able to not just bridge the binaries (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Tejeda, & Rivera, 1999) but begin to redefine, recreate, and rebuild (Soja) my practice where the binaries no longer existed, and only then I was able to open myself to teaching alternatives where incorporating both learning paradigms became paramount. Before I continue, I need to offer a further interpretation of thirdspace.

Gutiérrez et al. (1999), interpret thirdspace more educationally than Soja (1996) in that they view thirdspace as a bridge between “in” and “out” of school experiences. Gutiérrez et al. view thirdspace as a scaffold used to move students through the zone of proximal development connecting academic and home knowledge. In this view, building bridges between “in” and “out” of school knowledge experiences provided opportunities for students to experience success in schools where they received a traditional transmission teaching and learning approach.

This chapter predominantly draws on the work of Soja (1996) where competing knowledges are brought into conversation to challenge and reshape my teaching and learning practice. However, at times I have turned to the scaffold. I used thirdspace as a scaffold (Gutiérrez et al., 1999) when I bridged

my personal “in” and “out” (athletic) of school experiences and came to some understanding of what I captured from each experience in order to move myself closer to self-actualizing. I also used thirdspace as a scaffold where I challenged my teacher candidates to interrogate conventional traditional teaching methods in relation to more progressive teaching strategies such as experiential learning, performance-based learning, and culminating performance tasks. After moving my students through the zone of proximal development and into an uncomfortable space where their own binaries emerged, this is when thirdspace took on a “Sojaesque” feel and where epistemological change became potentially possible.

In sum, I draw on both interpretations of thirdspace. I utilized the bridge/scaffold (Gutiérrez et al., 1999) vision of thirdspace when the data required a bridge or scaffold to be understood. I have also attempted to bring the binaries that existed in my life into conversation by revisioning how competing learning paradigms and teaching approaches can be reframed, recreated, and rebuilt (Soja, 1996) into new knowledge, which I will discuss next.

### **Constructing Third Space**

*Teaching is an act of hope for a better future. The rewards of teaching are neither ostentatious nor obvious—they are often internal, invisible, and of the moment. But paradoxically, they can be deeper, more lasting, and less illusory than the cut of your clothes or the size of your home. (Ayers, 2001, p. 24)*

*Teacher*

When I entered the teaching profession the political climate created a workplace tension like no other tension I have ever experienced since. The tension existed between government and teachers, administration and teachers, parents and teachers, students and teachers, teachers in the senior panel and teachers in the elementary panel, and even teachers and teachers in each panel and in our own schools. After 6 years of teaching, I was prepared to leave the profession, but as a person motivated to overcome adversity, I was not prepared to throw in the towel. I loved teaching, but I did not enjoy the politics of teaching and how the politics behind the educational machine affected students' self-esteem. But after 10 years of academic work I am grateful that I came into the teaching and learning profession in such a tumultuous time, since without that tension I might not have become the radical teacher practitioner I have become or to use Giroux's term, "transformative intellectual" (Giroux, 2010, p. 201), a "practicing theoretician, willing and able to reflect the fluid nature of the world around them" (Winfield, 2010, p. 226).

The ineffective implementation of the new Ontario curriculum affected many students adversely, and this affected me even more than I realized. I knew I needed to find a pedagogical approach to teaching and learning that genuinely placed the social, emotional, and spiritual needs of a child at the center of my practice. In order to accomplish this vision, I attempted to create a space, through the implementation of the Circle Meeting which I discussed thoroughly in Chapter One, where there was a yearning for deep connection,

where students felt inclined to search for meaning and purpose, where there was space to foster the creative drive, and a place for students to hunger for joy and delight (Kessler, 2000). I needed to do this for two reasons. One, I could sense a staggering increase in bouts of anxiety from my students around school-related issues, primarily in the form of homework expectations, the new more challenging Ontario curriculum, the drive for a standardized performance, and the push for accountability. Second, I believe I experienced a heightened sensitivity to my students' frustration as a direct result of my own disheartening experiences as a student. I was not able to articulate this at the time, but after carefully examining my practice through the writing of this dissertation, the many learning difficulties my own students' experienced had an impact on me. Creating a holistic teaching and learning practice where the mind, body, and spirit of the student was nourished was necessary in order to heal my students and in order to heal myself.

I never believed I would be able to reconcile the tensions that existed in my own experience as an unintelligent student/learner, but through this process I have been able to. I wonder how many people get the opportunity to bring together the binaries that exist in their own lives? Being a teacher who was acutely aware of her students' needs helped me to guide them in their learning experiences using a variety of teaching approaches that attempted to merge the binaries that existed in their educational experience. I attempted to create a stimulating learning environment by tapping into the multiple and diverse funds of knowledge at my disposal. By utilizing varied and diverse learning

experiences I was demonstrating the qualities of a skillful teacher (Brookfield, 2006) while unbeknownst to me at the time, simultaneously reconciling the chasm that existed for me in my perceived identity as an unintelligent student/learner. Integrating the funds of knowledge as a result of my lived experiences at home, at school, and in the athletic arena helped me to mend the binaries of my “home” and “school” experiences and my “athletic” and “school” experiences. Was I already creating and using thirdspace as an elementary teacher but just did not have the language to name it as such? I believe I was. By finding a pedagogical approach that attempted to bring wholeness back into my students’ educational experience I believe I was redefining, recreating, and rebuilding (Soja, 1996) my teaching and learning practice as well as myself. In this instance, thirdspace could be viewed as a space where both student and the teacher played a role in the movement towards a potential transformational experience. “Opening to [a] moment and into [the] depths,” such as a circle meeting, “[did] not take away from the information exchange but [made] it richer, [gave] it context and [brought] it alive” (Hart, 2009, p. 2). It created a space where new knowledge was created and a community of learners came into being.

Being an elementary school teacher helped me to merge the tensions between “in” and “out” of school experiences that I held onto from childhood, and as a result I became a better teacher practitioner. I strove to meet the many and varied needs of as many students as I could since I felt my needs as a student learner were rarely met. But working with students was only one layer

of my experience as a teacher/learner. Due to my incessant curiosity with how and what stimulated student learning, I was able to continue deepening my perspective into how I could improve my teaching practice. With the success of my Master of Education action research, what nourishes the spirit of the adolescent in the classroom, a door was opened for me to pursue an academic career and I walked through.

### *Academic*

The written account *Doors* in my collection of narratives made reference to the fact that I gained entry into my graduate and postgraduate programs by virtue of being a gifted athlete. I believed I gained entry through the “athletic” door, not the “academic” door. Once again this created a binary tension between my “in” and “out” of school experiences and the feeling of being unintelligent rather than intelligent. For so long, the binary of this belief was reified in my everyday lived experiences. However, somewhere between becoming a skillful teacher where I was attentive to students’ needs, where I evolved into a contextually informed teacher/learner, where I could exercise emotional empathy for my students, and where I develop a deeper more complete knowledge of how students learn (Brookfield, 2006), and becoming a researcher, the binaries were synthesized.

Through the creative process of conducting research “the original binary choice” of considering myself unintelligent and/or intelligent “[was] not dismissed entirely but [was] subjected to a creative process of restructuring that [drew] selectively and strategically from the two opposing categories to open

new alternatives” (Soja, 1996, p. 5). As a person who was motivated to carry out research that was creative, emergent, and heuristic in nature, I was able to redefine, recreate, and rebuild my identity. I no longer viewed myself as an unintelligent person, and this in and of itself, I believe, improved my teaching and learning practice.

Through the writing of this dissertation, I came to the realization that I learned differently, specifically more deeply, through experiential learning experiences. In addition, I relearned that thriving and excelling as a bodily/kinesthetic learner is an intelligence, not just a skill or a talent (Gardner, 1983, 1999). Last, I also learned that for me to gain a deep sustained understanding of a concept, it needed to become embodied. Before I go on to synthesize the themes using thirdspace, I need to explain what thinking “trialectically” (Soja, 1996) suggests, since it is a necessary part of understanding thirdspace more fully.

Binaries make up the first two spaces and a thirdspace, that cannot stand alone separate from the first two spaces, providing a space for restructuring. Thinking trialectically, then, can be seen as a triad of terms such as representing–represented–representation, “with the third term different yet encompassing and partially dependent upon the other two” (Soja, 1996, p. 69). In addition, thinking trialectically could be seen as “three spatialities–perceived, conceived, and lived–with no one inherently privileged *a priori*” (Soja, p. 68). What is important in these examples is that the “third term never stands alone, totally separate from its precedents or given absolute precedence on its own”



(Soja, p. 70). If I return to the opening example under this subheading, where my perceived identity was that of an unintelligent student/learner, in contrast to being perceived intelligent in my home environment, I can now revisit it through trialectical thinking under the triad of terms identity–contradiction–difference (Soja, p. 70). My identity was perceived as unintelligent, intelligent is its contradictory term, and between the two spaces is difference. In thirdspace, the difference between being unintelligent and intelligent is interrogated. This is where I was able to restructure my identity and reconfigure it. For example when I was engaged in athletics I felt competent and my self-esteem was high. The difference between the binaries supported a feeling of intelligence. However, when I was in a classroom, I felt incompetent and my self-esteem was low. The difference between the binaries promoted a feeling of being unintelligent. In this triad the third term, difference, played a crucial role in my perceived intelligence or lack thereof. The first two spaces never stood alone but rather were in conversation with the thirdspace. This is where drawing from the two opposing categories opened me up to consider new alternatives.

Self-study research in an educational setting follows the same line of thinking. It is situated in thirdspace between the binaries of the theory of teaching and learning and the practice of teaching and learning, with the triad of terms being theory–practice–self-study. The third term, self-study, never stands alone, totally separate from theory and/or practice or given complete priority on its own. This dissertation has allowed me to draw selectively and strategically

from the *theories* of teaching and learning at my disposal and from my *practical* teaching and learning experiences, and in doing so I have been able to redefine, recreate, and rebuild my self, which has led me to consider new alternatives when working with beginning teachers guiding them through the teaching and learning process. I return to Parker J. Palmer (1998) and his assertion when it comes to the complexity of teaching, for quite simply, “we teach who we are” (p. 2). Often who we are is not simple, and that makes researching the self not simple, which in turn makes teaching and learning not simple. Trialectical thinking is not simple either, but rather it “is difficult, for it challenges all conventional modes of thought and taken-for-granted epistemologies. It is disorderly, unruly, constantly evolving, unfixed, never presentable in permanent constructions” (Soja, 1996, p. 70). It aligns with a self-study since studying the self is disorderly, unruly, constantly evolving, unfixed, and never presentable in permanent constructions. However, for me, researching the self was essential in my growth as a teacher practitioner, as a researcher, as an academic, as an instructor working with beginning teachers, and as a humanistic whose life’s work is to move towards becoming self-actualized.

Becoming a teacher opened the door for me to complete a M.Ed., which ultimately led me to researching the self. Conducting a self-study research project highlighted and named the ways I intuitively improved my practice with children when the need arose. Upon examination, the themes that emerged out of this self-study have led me to articulate ways that I can continue to improve my teaching and learning practice with beginning teachers.

At many junctures I felt that the themes that emerged from the data just did not fit together, but through working with Probyn's (1990) metaphor of local, locale, and location and Drake's (2007) KNOW/DO/BE framework in Chapters Four and Five, and at present thirdspace theory, these diverse scaffolds helped to bring the themes together and supported me in answering the question, how do I improve my practice teaching foundational methods to beginning teachers?

When I apply thinking trialectically to the triad of terms local–locale–location, the third term, location, is different yet encompasses and is partially dependent on local, and locale. Location, seen in this light, is a thirdspace where the local and locale become knowable. In Chapter Five, I linked the three themes that emerged from the data generation to the local, locale, and location metaphor. Experiential learning was linked to local, identity linked to locale, and finally embodied knowing or embodiment was linked to location. When I apply thinking trialectically to the three themes that emerged from the data generation, experiential learning–identity–embodiment, I have a clearer understanding of how embodiment is dependent on experiential learning and my identity and how no one space is privileged over the other. Put another way, learning experientially, whether in the local of school, at home, or in the athletic arena, increased the chance for me to have an embodied experience in any location and therefore retain the knowledge I experienced and hence shift my locale identity to one of intelligent. Becoming aware of the fact that intelligence can be acquired in any setting and that one setting does not take

precedence over another has been empowering. It has given me the confidence to not only teach a variety of learning theories to beginning teachers, but in addition I am able to confidently cultivate other ways of knowing that may or may not resonate with my students' own perception of intelligence. Becoming more aware of who I am as a learner, and appreciating the multiple funds of knowledge I bring to the teaching and learning process can only improve my teaching and learning practice since we teach who we are. Being who I am then plays a role in the success and/or failure of being a skillful teacher. Applying thinking trialectically to Drake's (2007) KNOW-DO-BE, the third term, BE, never stands alone, totally separate from the KNOW or the DO. When I am in the classroom the BE is never given complete priority on its own. It is always in conversation with what I would like students to know and what I would like students to do. I consistently model what I want them to know and do by being the teacher I hope they will become.

Throughout my academic journey, both the action research I conducted for my M.Ed. and this self-study has forced me to deepen my understanding of the learning theories that underpin a skillful teaching and learning practice. In addition, my predisposition to being a reflective practitioner also provided me with a vital tool to not only reflect in and on action but to continue to take ongoing action to improve my teaching and learning practice throughout my career. I did not ever foresee or envision an academic career upon my horizon. It was not something I worked towards, but rather it was a space that opened up and I walked through the door. "Thirdspace is a purposefully tentative and

flexible term that attempts to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meaning” (Soja, 1996, p. 2) and so is the academic space where I work with beginning teachers. It is a space where one can expand his/her imagination beyond its current limits. It is a space where self-study can be seen as something more than navel gazing or in constant scrutiny of being considered “theory light.” It is a space that when used, the radical challenge is to think differently and not recast old ways, and as Soja warns, “no matter how tasty the vintage has been in the past” (p. 2).

Both my teaching and academic lives have opened the door for me to improve my practice with beginning teachers. As a teacher I gained critical practical knowledge in the field. Through story I have shared many practical experiences with my teacher candidates which brings the theory to life. Ironically, when I was teaching, it was suggested that I pursue a M.Ed. to ground my practical experiences and name what I do intuitively. Friere (1970) says :

To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*. Human beings are not named in silence, but in word – which is work, in action-reflection. (p. 88)

I followed the suggestion to pursue a M.Ed. and I named what I was doing in the classroom. This strengthened my theoretical knowledge so that when I made pedagogical decisions they were grounded in both the theory and practice. I embraced both modes of knowledge and as a result brought theory and

practice into harmony with one another. Naming what I do (theory) and putting it to work (practice) is praxis. It is through praxis, action and reflection, that I can provide a potentially transformational experience with my beginning teachers (Freire). I met the call when it was suggested I learn the theory behind the learning paradigms more deeply. Ironically, now I am instructing beginning teachers and I use my practical experience to illuminate the theory while they are students in a classroom setting. What I have concluded is “at the point of encounter there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they know” (Freire, p. 90). Being open to learning more than I know, from texts, from my students, from my peers, from my family, from my own lived practical experiences is how I will continue to improve my practice as an instructor of Foundational Methods for beginning teachers.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: I MUST WALK THROUGH THE GATE

This final chapter is one of critical reflection. I look back to Chapter One and revisit the questions I asked there in light of the experience of completing a self-study. The questions I addressed are:

1. How do I improve my practice so I meet the needs of beginning teacher candidates?
2. How do I become a more effective teacher educator that positively influences others?

I also refer back to what I perceived at the outset as the significances of the study:

1. To contribute to a growing body of approaches to the teaching and learning process that bridge accountability and relevance and,
2. To provide a template for other teachers to examine their own practice through autoethnographic story—this examination may result in an improved teaching and learning practice

I also reflect on the writing process, specifically the process of utilizing writing and a method of inquiry and autoethnoethnography both as method and as text. The importance of this distinction must not be overlooked. Next, I consider the relevance of my self-study in light of the present educational climate and consider some insights I have learned from its completion. Last, I suggest some future studies generated by the self-study.

### Questions Revisited

The question that drove this self-study was how do I improve my practice so I meet the needs of beginning teacher candidates? Chapter Six discussed how pursuing postgraduate degrees, both the M.Ed. and the PhD, while teaching full time exposed me to new learning theories, new teaching strategies, and a holistic curriculum that I could implement without delay. This exposure allowed me to deepen my relationship with the text by virtue of being able to directly apply what I learned into a classroom situation without time constraints. The advantage of this learning experience was that it was self-generated and self-directed. The reciprocal nature of integrating the theory with the practice became seamless and allowed me to spiral what I was learning in my academic courses with previous theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge and as a result improve my teaching and learning practice.

In addition, the successful implementation of a holistic curriculum (Kessler, 2000) that I was exposed to during my Master's coursework opened the door for me to pursue an academic career. Being immersed in an academic setting has allowed me to potentially reach more teachers and effect change at a more profound level. Mitchell and Sackney (2009) define a sustainable educational systems as "*those in which the structures, programs, expectations, and practices do not interfere with but actively support people's inherent ability to learn*" (p. 12). By virtue of continuing my own professional learning I was able to experiment with the learning theories I was exposed to. In doing so I believe I was supporting my students' ability to learn and creating a sustainable



educational system within my own classroom. Furthermore, Mitchell and Sackney, whose persistent focus was on learning, go on to state that “it is the evidence of authentic learning that emerges naturally when people attend to conditions in their environment and respond in ways that have personal meaning for them” (p. 13). I do believe that throughout my career I have attempted to create a teaching and learning environment that responded and continues to respond to the needs of my students of all ages. I hope that the ripple effect of attending to my students’ needs by being a teacher who continues to learn permeates the educational system at a broader level. I did not anticipate this powerful escalating connection between theory and practice and sustainability from the outset of this study, but after I was exposed to thirdspace theory, the intensity of my ability to put theory into practice and the immediacy of that commitment created a hybrid space where new alternatives for teaching and learning were achievable and sustainability possible.

As my career advanced to teaching Foundational Methods at the university level, I was able to integrate concrete teaching examples from my own practical teaching experience as an elementary teacher, while at the same time revealing a variety of learning theories and teachings strategies that grounded my practice. This allowed me to illustrate how theory informs practice and how practice in turn informs theory. My ability to do this helped to meet the needs of my beginning teacher candidates and at the same time improve my practice. To recap, as an elementary teacher I continued to deepen my knowledge base by taking academic courses, and this in turn provided me

with a broader knowledge base so I could meet the needs of my students in the classroom. At that point, I was then able to share 16 years of practical teaching experience with groups of beginning teachers, which has been instrumental in my success as a university instructor. Without the practical elementary teaching experience, my instruction at this level would be barren. Teaching teachers is not the same as teaching children; however, both experiences, as a teacher and as an academic, have had a profound influence on my ability to become a skillful instructor. By being a person who continued to learn and hone her craft throughout her career, it is my hope that the beginning teachers I work with will be encouraged to do the same so that they too will be able to improve their teaching and learning practice throughout their careers and become life long learners.

In addition to integrating theories I have learned into my teaching and learning practice, and by reconciling the binaries of the “in” and “out” school experiences that existed in my life, through the writing of this dissertation, I am now able to approach the next phase of my academic career with a deeper self-understanding. Having a renewed faith in myself as both an academic and a teacher will continue to pave the way for me to keep making a continual attempt to improve my teaching and learning practice.

My findings are not generalizable due to the fact this is a self-study, but what I am able to do is connect my findings to the Ontario College of Teachers (2006) *Foundations of Professional Practice* and highlight both the Standards

of Practice of the Teaching Profession and the Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession, since both documents corroborate my findings.

The Standards of Practice outline Ontario's commitment to students and student learning, leadership in communities, ongoing professional learning, professional knowledge, and professional practice. I adhered to all five standards, but the final three standards were illuminated in this self-study as the standards that infused my practice and allowed me to continually improve my practice. I was committed to ongoing professional learning, not just through my graduate studies but also through Additional Qualification courses. I earned my Special Education Specialist and my Computers in the Classroom Specialist Certificates, I participated in board workshops, and I contributed to curriculum writing teams. Throughout these experiences I was able to keep abreast of current professional knowledge that allowed me to improve my practice. Finally, being able to apply my learning and knowledge directly into my teaching and learning practice gave me the opportunity to try out current learning theories and teaching strategies which kept my teaching and learning practice changing and improving. My findings are in alignment with Ontario's goals and aspirations for developing teachers who are knowledgeable, skillful, and professional, but like my self-study, one must self-regulate their learning and adhere to the standards set out by the Ontario College of Teachers (2006) since it is difficult to ensure this in fact is happening. I will discuss the Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession in the next section.

The second question that I attempted to answer in this self-study was how do I become a more effective teacher educator that positively influences others? In Chapters Four and Five, I shared vignettes that modeled the behaviours I encouraged my beginning teachers to exemplify: being flexible, changing my practice to meet the needs of each group of students I work with, knowing one's self, but still being open to and able to change, having a sound knowledge base, and being able to reflect in- and on-action (Schön, 1983) to name just a few. Using Drake's (2007) KNOW/DO/BE framework I shared stories that reflected authentic moments where I attempted to positively influence others by *being* the teacher practitioner I hope my beginning teachers will view as embodying both a skillful teacher (Brookfield, 2006) and a positive role model. However, I am well aware that my way of being does not always positively influence everyone. But, by paying attention, I do make a concerted effort to meet the needs of most of the teacher candidates I work alongside, and hopefully they will aspire to do the same for their future students.

My desire to meet the needs of the students I work with is in alignment with the Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006) where I was exemplifying the four ethical standards—care, trust, respect, and integrity. Care includes compassion, acceptance, interest, and insight for developing students' potential. Trust embodies fairness, openness, and honesty with regards to all professional relationships within the teaching profession. Teachers honour human dignity, emotional wellness, and cognitive development when modeling respect, and finally integrity, where honesty,

reliability and moral action are embodied in this ethical standard. Once again, even though my findings are not generalizable they are mirrored in a document that outlines the Ontario College of Teachers *Foundations of Professional Practice*. These are the core ethical standards deemed essential for teachers to develop and grow as professionals.

### **Significance of This Self-Study**

It was my hope that this self-study would accomplish two things. First contribute to a growing body of approaches to the teaching and learning process that bridge accountability and relevance and second to provide a template for other teachers to examine their own practice through autoethnographic story which might result in an improved teaching and learning practice.

Upon revisiting the first ambitious desire of contributing to a growing body of approaches, it is still my hope that beginning teachers and seasoned teachers alike, after reading this dissertation, will become more aware and well informed of the variety of learning theories and teaching strategies one can employ that will meet the social, emotional, and spiritual needs of a child which will bridge accountability and relevance. I have become aware through the writing of this dissertation that if teachers are successful in meeting the social, emotional, and spiritual needs of a child, then they have not just bridged accountability and relevance, but they have created a thirdspace where new alternatives for students and the teachers to feel whole is imagined and created. It is my hope that the creation of thirdspace occurs before they become accountants of knowledge, for it is “knowledge that makes us believe we are

not perfect” and ultimately “it isn’t knowledge that will lead us to ourselves; it is wisdom” (Ruiz, 1999, p. 184). Wisdom, then, is what will lead the reader to him/herself and perhaps will give him/her the confidence to do what is right. “Wisdom is not just about what we know, but especially about how we live, how we embody knowledge and compassion in our lives and...blend a sense of what is true with what is right” (Hart, 2003, p. 27). This study unveiled the realization that I am an experiential learner who needs to embody knowledge in order to learn; therefore the notion of wisdom, as defined above, resonates with me. Blending a sense of what is true with what is right promoted my, at times, passionate pronouncements of teaching holistically by attending to the mind, body, and spirit of the student before addressing what a student needs to know.

Two matters became evident through my writing; one is that I must attend more closely to the needs of students who are more logical and analytical to meet their individual needs as learners. I need to provide more structure and opportunities for direct instruction to take place. Second, I have realized that I cannot force this philosophy on anyone but only make people aware that it exists, for it is only *I* who can walk through the gate. Initially, the title of this dissertation was “You must walk through the gate,” but somewhere along the way I had a transformational moment where I came to the realization that only I can walk through the gate when conducting a self-study that is moving towards answering the question, how do I improve my practice? The only thing I can do is continue to model the behaviours of a skillful teacher who embodies humanist/constructivist teaching and learning practices. I need to become more

sensitive to students who require a more logical, inflexible teaching and learning approach and continue to uphold the ethical standards of professional practice and hope that this encourages beginning teachers to follow suit in their own unique way. This leads me to my second desire of providing a template for teachers to examine themselves.

I am embarrassed by the presumption I made at the outset of my research that studying the self can be reduced to a template, for I do not believe it can. One can interrogate the self in many ways through poetry, visual arts, performing arts, and so forth. I happened to use writing about my past to unlock who I was which allowed me to grow into the person I am and still becoming. The reader needs to decide which path is best for him/herself to explore. Once a person finds the right method for him/herself to pursue the potential for a person to open the door to knowing one's self more deeply, or perhaps in a new light, is palpable. Since we teach who we are (Palmer, 1998), knowing thyself could become the impetus for a teacher to improve his/her teaching and learning practice.

### **Writing Process**

The writing process one endures when conducting a self-study cannot be understated. It is an arduous affair that, when completed with passion and honesty, there is a chance that the writing will be painful as it may unearth buried emotions not yet attended to. But not everyone allows the pain to surface, and some people even need to defend themselves against pain. However, as Ellis (2004) articulates, "though pain often occurs in

autoethnography it doesn't have to take over" (p. 111) the writing. I wrote about feeling unintelligent and as a result have worked through the pain I endured.

In addition, there is a level of fear when doing this kind of work. I did not experience fear with regards to revealing my own life, but I have experienced some fear in how I represented others in my stories. It is my sincere hope that I did no harm (Denzin, 2003) and that I managed to capture the essence of the situation I was writing about as openly and honestly as I could. As for my immediate family members, specifically my Mom and Mary whom I wrote so intimately about, they have read everything I have written and in fact gave me their consent to write about them long before I wrote one word. I agree with Ellis (2004) in that "we should be responsible to those to those we write about" (p. 145). I thank them both for giving me free rein to write my interpretation of my lived experiences.

At the outset, I spent a lot of time pondering the method of writing autoethnographically and the ethics of doing so. In the midst of my pondering, I concluded that I conduct myself from an ethical center where my mantra is to do no harm. "Ethical conduct connotes activity that is fair, uplifting, in keeping with and, one hopes, advancing moral norms" (Bell, 2002, p. 12). Once I recognized that I do indeed wish to advance moral norms, it was at that point that I gave myself permission to take on this kind of work. I believe this is reflected in my writing. Writing autoethnographically is an interesting process



in and of itself, but adding writing as a method of inquiry into this layered qualitative methodology created a more unsettling writing process.

I began with a memory of an experience, and I wrote a story about that experience. The story contained all the traditional elements one would find in a story: setting, plot, characters, dialogue, emotions, texture, climax, and denouement. Since this is a self-study, I am Hilary in the present writing about Hilary at 5, Hilary at 13, Hilary at 35, and so forth. This is what Brockmeier (2001) refers to as retrospective teleology, where there is a fusion of all time orders.

Autobiographical narrative: the time of the story and of the plot which together constitute the order of narrated time that finally blends with the discourse order of narrative time. The result of this fusion is autobiographical time, the time of one's life history. Only if we bear in mind this multivocal texture of time (and its inherent oscillations between various temporal constellations), do we understand what it means that the past of a life becomes ordered in light of the present. (p. 276)

I had to become a Hilary from a past time and speak like that Hilary, and through the writing process the experience I was writing about often surfaced as a topic of conversation outside of my writing. I would ask my Mom and/or Mary questions, like would I have said this, would I have done that, or would I have behaved in this manner in order to explore past Hilarys and to verify that I was being true to who I was. At one point, I even searched for photographs of

Hilary at approximately the age of the experience I was writing about. I kept the photo of that Hilary nearby looking at her and wondering what she was feeling and thinking.

While looking at the photo and composing the story I attempted to capture that one thing, that kernel of an experience that would allow me to enter that time and place so I could begin to put the pieces back together again in the present. This was not an easy task but rather one that took a concentrated effort over a long period of time, but eventually I think I arrived at a place where my identities were revealed. Bockmeier (2001) believes that autobiographical stories play a central role in human identity construction because of their implicit retrospective teleology. Time had a way of stripping from me a lot of what I remembered about myself, but by rekindling and placing in linear order plots that made up parts of my life, I was able to (re)capture those kernels or moments in time by allowing the ones that needed to surface to reveal themselves in order to make sense of a life lived. But, and here is the rub, while I was writing these stories trying to recapture the Hilary that was, I was unaware of what these kernels or moments in time were since I was allowing myself to write my way into being using writing as a method of inquiry.

Writing as a method of inquiry is a different process from autoethnography. In autoethnography you can plan out and organize the story you are writing, but in writing as a method of inquiry the underlying design is to allow the stories to spring forth, where the writing *is* the process of discovery. No one could assist me by telling me what stories to write. The

process needed to be emergent and heuristic. Writing itself was both thinking and analysis (L. Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). It was very much a solitary journey. I was writing to find out something I did not know before. But when I was in the middle of this arduous task I began to doubt myself. I questioned the significance of the stories I was writing. After all, they were just a collection of stories about my rather mundane life. I wrote about going for a walk in a park, cycling up a hill, researching and dramatizing the hanging of Louis Riel, and presenting a speech, to name just a few. When I was in the midst of doubting myself, I happened to hear Sharon Butala, a renowned Canadian author, speak at a conference. Butala is a memoirist. She wrote a book entitled, *The Perfection of the Morning: An Apprenticeship in Nature* (1994) about her life on a Saskatchewan ranch. It is a beautifully written account of a life lived. During her talk, Butala shared a story about a phone call she had made to her editor just days before the book was released. Her mood was one of desperation when she confessed to her editor that she felt that what she had written was all lies. She doubted her content and she doubted the process of exploring the self. I was taken aback by her revelation. My fear was heard. I, too, at times did not know if what I was writing was true. Each event was an interpretation of an interpretation. Was I too a liar?

*The Perfection of Morning* (1994) became a best seller and in my opinion Butala's story was told with integrity and respect for herself, her family, and the land. I felt she had accomplished what she set out to do and that was to reveal a self through lived experiences. Her shared secret about

questioning her memories and her stories, helped to see me through those dark days when I doubted the content I was writing and the process I was immersed in. I turned my thoughts around and convinced myself to *trust the process*. I kept repeating this phrase like a mantra. This period of the self-study was the most difficult phase to overcome, which leads me to conclude that when undergoing this type of research process, not having a clear-cut path could be quite unsettling for people who need a more structured, linear approach. I, however, enjoyed the freedom to explore, in a retrospective fashion, the backward and forward temporality, trying to make sense simultaneously of both directions in the present as well as the outward, inward motif (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Self-study suited my embodied way of knowing, and autoethnography and writing as a method of inquiry quenched my thirst for learning experientially.

### **Educational Relevance of Self-Study**

The relevance of self-study in light of the present educational climate has been significant for me. First, continuing my academic studies shortly into my teaching career opened the door for me to propel my career into an academic setting. At the university level working with beginning teachers I can effect change on a broader scale and hence have a greater impact with my message of teaching the whole child. At the same time I can implement learning approaches and teaching strategies that support this philosophy. If I am successful, then I can create an awareness for beginning teachers of the possibilities at their disposal. It is my hope that if not now, then perhaps in the

future, they will adopt a balanced, integrated approach, such as Drake's (2007) KNOW/DO/BE framework, and use it to guide their teaching and learning practice. In this environment the BE drives the process. The teacher is being, or living the qualities s/he desires from his/her students such as honesty an ethic of care, trust, integrity, and respect. In this teaching and learning environment the students are placed at the center of his/her practice. The teacher does not reduce his/her practice to comply with practices, procedures, and strategies that do not cultivate true learning such as covering the curriculum and teaching to the test.

Self-study is a powerful form of professional development. It epitomizes Lorna Earl's (2003) assessment as learning, whereby self-monitoring through metacognition and the application of self-regulatory strategies is at play. When one interrogates the self in an honest and authentic manner, then s/he has the chance to assess and evaluate where the gaps in his/her teaching and learning practice reside and then fill in the gaps and become a skillful teacher (Brookfield, 2006). In order to do this a teacher must commit to ongoing professional learning, strive to keep current through professional knowledge, and apply that knowledge to promote student learning (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006). In addition, a teacher must employ these standards through an ethic of care, trust, respect, and integrity (Ontario College of Teachers). Becoming aware of weaknesses in one's teaching and learning practice through self-study is not sufficient to effect change. A teacher must take action and find ways to improve their teaching and learning practice. By

implementing the standards for practice and the ethical standards for the teaching profession, only then has a teacher attempted to create a space where the student and the teacher can mutually thrive.

Last, an ongoing investigation of the self in relation to an individual's teaching and learning practice can offset the stresses that present themselves in this type of vocation. By continuously being in tune with one's teaching and learning practice and making the subtle adjustments necessary on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis, events such as meet the teacher night, assessment and evaluation practices, the report card writing process, parent teacher interviews, teacher performance appraisals, professional development days, and even casual discussions on current trends in education can be a positive and enlightening experience rather than a stressful negative, pessimistic one.

Overall, self-study is an efficient and effective way to monitor one's practice whether s/he is an elementary teacher or a university instructor. As a professional, I am accountable to myself to become the best teacher educator I am capable of being, but more important, I am accountable to my students, for they are the people who are going to go out into the field to positively affect the lives of so many future young people. I need to be the best I can be so the teacher candidates I work with can become the best they can become. Introducing self-study as a form of professional development in my Foundational Methods course can provide them with a tool from the outset of their careers that will allow them to build a comprehensive teaching and learning practice.

### **Future Studies**

One suggestion for a future study is to examine the self and hence one's teaching practice, using a different method other than writing, for example a/r/t/ography, where a/r/t/ography is inherently about the self as artist/researcher/teacher (Irwin, 2005), but in addition it is also about people coming together to engage in shared inquiries and act as critical friends (Irwin), which would be an interesting way to provide a unique and focused form of professional development for teachers.

Another study could examine teaching and overall self well-being in the sense that well-being could reflect the whole person mind, body, and spirit. A study could examine how a person's self well-being, in any one of those domains or all, is reflected in his/her teaching practice. I believe there might be a connection between a person's self-concept in relation to how willing a person is to engage in a self-examination in relation to his/her teaching practice. Over the past 3 years when asked by teachers what I was researching, I cannot count the number of times the person stated outright that s/he would never want to engage in a self-study around his/her teaching practice. Or they were simply amazed that I would want to interrogate the self. This got me thinking about a teacher who has a positive self-concept and wondering if that somehow manifests in his/her teaching and learning practice. Conversely, if a teacher does not have a positive self-concept, does that somehow manifest in his/her teaching and learning practice? And if so, how do we create a positive environment for teachers to feel good about themselves if in fact a poor self-

concept does negatively impact their teaching and learning practice. This study could perhaps take the form of a mixed methodology.

Last, more teachers need to share their personal teaching and learning stories, both positive and negative, to address the same question I addressed, how do I improve my teaching and learning practice? By sharing their story of how they did or did not improve their teaching and learning practice, this could assist all teachers in their journey to become skillful teaching and learning practitioners by circumventing the mistakes a teacher made or by embracing a rich teaching and learning practice. Both are equally important.

### **And Finally...**

Throughout the writing of this dissertation I attempted to find ways to improve my teaching and learning practice, and in doing so I needed to recognize why I approached my teaching and learning practice as a humanist/constructivist and holistic teacher practitioner. This, in turn, directed me into the world of cognition and learning and knowledge construction, which unfortunately led me away from interrogating both my roots in Nature and my penchant for needing to be engaged in physical activity, both of which profoundly impacted my teaching and learning practice.

When I have an encounter in and with nature I am able to renew and replenish my self with a spiritual energy. According to Baldacchino (2009)

In this doctrine, it is assumed that the imagination reigns supreme in a life well examined by the means that experience – more so, *aesthetic experience* – lends us in the form of a released power of the imagination



deposited within the deep segments of the visual and performing arts, music and literature. (p. 20)

I am including Nature to this experiential list “within the deep segments of” Nature, for this is where for me, the aesthetic experience releases the power of my imagination. This is where experience is located. Experiencing the thrum of Nature presents a feeling of wholeness, which manifests in a blanket of serenity and calm.

Alongside my need for spending time in Nature is the need for my daily workout. Once a day I push myself to my physical limits through a regimented weight training program followed by a cardio session, and finishing with a stretching routine. The daily ritual of physical activity supplies me with the energy I require to navigate my life’s challenges more effectively. My time in Nature and my daily physical activity also provided the spiritual and embodied support I needed to complete this dissertation, for without these daily encounters I would not have been able to endure the trial and tribulations of completing this kind of work.

The energy I am able to generate through my penchant for pushing myself physically and my forages in Nature which provided me with a sense of serenity and calm have allowed me to subsume the pressures and tensions that the teaching and learning and now an academic profession encourage. This leaves me with a trialectical triad of terms to reflect this thirdspace or hybrid space where I retreat to improve my practice; they are energy–calm – improvement. The binaries of energy and calm in this “counterspace” are in

continual conversation with the notion of improvement. I move into this counterspace when the world becomes filled with challenges that are out of my immediate control. I do so because I need to understand how these challenges are impacting my teaching and learning practice. The *thrum* of Nature that pulses through my body as I hike through Algonquin Park and the sweat that pours out of my body when I push myself physically are two by-products of the embodiment I experience when addressing the challenges in my life. This is where my academic journey will continue as I walk through the gate and into a space that examines well-being and teaching.

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**Appendix A**  
**Informed Consent**